THE CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY OF AMERICA

THE ECCLESIOLOGY OF JOHN WILLIAMSON NEVIN: A CATHOLIC APPRAISAL

A DISSERTATION

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MR	The Mercersburg Review
WM	The Weekly Messenger of the German Reformed Church
CC	Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, Lumen Gentium, of Vatican Council II
DE	Decree on Ecumenism, Unitatis Reintegratio
CL	Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, Sacrosanctum Concilium
MW	Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, Gaudium et Spes

INTRODUCTION

John Williamson Nevin (1803-1886) was a prime mover, along with Philip Schaff, of a new theological direction in nineteenth-century American Protestantism. The historical, christocentric, sacramental, and ecclesial approach to theology associated with their names came to be known as the "Mercersburg Theology" after the location of the college and seminary of the German Reformed Church in America in Mercersburg, Pennsylvania with which they were associated. The German Reformed Church had been relatively unknown until the advent of Nevin and Schaff in the 1840's. One of the minor Reformed bodies, it traced its history to 1559 when the elector, Frederick III, of the Palatinate accepted Calvin's views on the Lord's supper and a modified form of Calvinism. In America it was isolated by its German language, mainly rural, and confined for the most part to eastern Pennsylvania, Maryland, and Ohio.

Both Nevin and Schaff were professors at the seminary in Mercersburg during the years in which they developed a theology directly opposed to the individualistic evangelicalism then dominating the American religious scene. This anti-traditionalist collective opponent was dubbed "Puritanism" by the Mercersburgers. In their opposition they differed radically with the conservative Calvinism of Princeton and Andover, the

more liberal theology of Yale and Union, and with the enthusiastic Methodism mushrooming in the mid-nineteenth century. Within the German Reformed Church itself their theology was opposed by a pocket of "Puritans" who could not accept the catholic tradition they were recovering. Not a year after Nevin and Schaff began their collaboration in 1844-45, they were defendants in a trial for heresy.

There was wide indifference to the concerns of the two professors at Mercersburg in the mid-nineteenth century; but as the church historian, James Hastings Nichols, has written, their interest in the church "establishes them as major prophets of the twentieth-century ecumenical movement."[1] In the same vein another historian of the history of religion in America, Winthrop Hudson, has said of Nevin's relevance for our time that "the main reason for his failure to be heard was the fact that he addressed himself to issues which were not to be keenly felt until the twentieth century."[2]

Unlike the German, Schaff, John Nevin was a native American, born not far from Mercersburg. He had a Presbyterian religious formation. After his course at the Princeton Seminary, he taught there from 1826-1828 and then filled a ten year assignment at Princeton's sister institution in Pittsburgh, Western Seminary. In 1840 he accepted a professorship at the seminary of the German Reformed Church in America in Mercersburg.

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[1] Romanticism in American Theology (Chicago, 1961), p. 4.

[2] Religion in America (New York, 1965), pp. 170-71.

From 1841 he was simultaneously professor at the seminary and President of Marshall College, located at the same place. He resigned as professor at the end of 1851 but continued to write prolifically until 1852. This ended his most productive period, toward the end of which he manifested an interest in Roman Catholicism. During this time he wrote for the Weekly Messanger, a publication of the German Reformed Church, on current theological questions. After its founding in 1849, he contributed to the Mercersburg Review, a theological journal published by the Alumni Association of Marshall College. During his years as editor of the Review, from 1849-1852, he wrote at least one article for every issue and he continued to contribute one or more articles to every volume until 1883. Altogether his writing for the Review totalled some twenty-eight hundred pages.

In 1853 Dr. Nevin resigned as President of Marshall College and remained in semi-retirement for eight years. During that time, however, he was a member of a committee for revising the liturgy of the German Reformed Church, and he continued to write for the Review. From 1861-1866 he returned to the classroom as instructor of history at Franklin and Marshall College in Lancaster, Pennsylvania where both the seminary and Marshall College had moved in 1853. It was at this time that he prepared a book-length historical introduction for the tercentenary memorial edition of The Heidelberg Catechism in 1863.

From 1866-1876 John Nevin was President of Franklin and Marshall College. In the meantime, he contributed some significant articles to the

Review; and a seventeen-part series of biographical sketches appeared in 1870 in the Weekly Messenger which have been published recently as My Own Life (Lancaster, 1964). In his retirement after 1876 Nevin showed an interest in the writings of Emmanuel Swedenborg, the Swedish mystic. The ten articles written for the Review between 1876-1883 reflect a deep mystical bent. He died in 1886 at the age of eighty-three, fifty-seven years after he had published his first theological work as a young instructor.

While teaching at Princeton John Nevin prepared a manuscript later published as A Summary of Biblical Antiquities (1829) which reflects the kind of covenant theology taught there. The Anxious Bench (2nd ed., 1844) was a polemic against revivalism which was affecting some segments of the German Reformed Church in the 1840's. His most important work, The Mystical Presence (1846), was written to vindicate his stand that the real presence of Christ in the Lord's supper was the teaching of Calvin, and to show that the teaching was a reflection of an understanding of the church which was at odds with nineteenth century Protestantism in America. History and Genius of the Heidelberg Catechism (1847) reveals the Melancthonian influence on the theology of the church in the German Reformed Church. "The Church" (1847) is an important sermon issued in pamphlet form in which the dynamic nature of the visible church in process of growth is presented. In Antichrist; or the Spirit of Sect and Schism (1848), a sermon expanded into a tract, Nevin developed the theme that denial of a divine, historical church in the sectarian manner prominent

in much of Protestantism was, by implication, a denial of the incarnation and thus a badge of antichrist (1 John 4:1-3). The Liturgical Question (1862) is a report of the Liturgical Committee of the German Reformed Church in which Nevin clarifies the distinction between a pulpit liturgy and an altar liturgy. It emphasizes that in an altar liturgy the participation of the people in the sacrament and sacrifice of the altar is implied. In Vindication of the Revised Liturgy (1867), written against critics of a proposed revision of the liturgy, Nevin traces the history of the liturgical reform in the German Reformed Church in America; and he discusses the Christocentric, credal, historical, and objective theology underlying the liturgy. A collation of three sets of students' notes has been edited by W. H. Erb and published as Dr. Nevin's Theology (1913).[3]

Theodore Appel in Life and Works of John Williamson Nevin (Philadelphia, 1889) writes sketchily of the years from 1840 where Nevin's My Own Life ends. Luther J. Binkley has published a study, The Mercersburg Theology (Lancaster, 1953), whose purpose is to give a systematic presentation of the thought of Nevin and Schaff, but which extends beyond them to include other representatives of the movement. It has been criticized by James Hastings Nichols for not defining either the divergencies

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[3]In addition to the works referred to unpublished correspondence and lecture notes are available at the Library of the Historical Society of the Evangelical and Reformed Church in Franklin and Marshall College. Nevin's letters to Orestes Brownson and James A. McMaster reflecting his interest in Roman Catholicism are located at the University of Notre Dame; they are available on microfilm at the library of the Lancaster Theological Seminary, Lancaster, Pennsylvania.

among its representatives or their theological opposition. Kenneth Plummer's dissertation, The Theology of John Williamson Nevin to 1852 (Ph. D., University of Chicago, 1958), develops the whole spectrum of Nevin's theology during his most creative years. He traces the development of Nevin out of the rigid Calvinism in which he was educated, and he shows his philosophical and theological dependence upon Germany. In his Romanticism in American Theology (Chicago, 1961), James Hastings Nichols presents both Nevin and Schaff as the chief spokesmen in America for the churchly, sacramental movement which affected much of Christendom in the nineteenth century. His study of Nevin sheds light upon the latter's interest in Roman Catholicism in the early fifties, and it relates Nevin's themes to his theological opposition. Nichols has edited a second volume, The Mercersburg Theology (New York, 1966), a collection of representative writings from Nevin and Schaff with valuable introductions by the editor. I am indebted to this author for historical settings of several persons and events.

The present study will be an exposition of the ecclesiology of Nevin and a Roman Catholic appraisal of it in the light of Vatican II and contemporary theological developments. It will focus on the period in which he wrote concerning the church, from 1844 with his sermon, "Catholic Unity," reprinted in Philip Schaff's The Principle of Protestantism (1845), until 1873 with his reflections on the German Old Catholic movement's contribution to church unity. This is primarily a theological inquiry; it is

interested in the history of the period only as a background for understanding Nevin's theology of the church. The concept of the church as a community of life in Christ is based upon his presence in the mystical body. The sacraments as an expression of his presence and an offer of his life are a key to understanding the church. This is especially true of the eucharist, the understanding of which "must ever condition and rule in the end our view of Christ's person and the conception we form of the church."[4]

Nevin's appreciation of the church as a community of life in Christ is instructive for the Catholic Christian at a time when his church is renewing its self concept, righting the imbalance toward a hierarchical ecclesiology which counter-reformation theology created and which achieved official expression in the First Vatican Council. The ecclesiology of John Nevin reflects in the Protestant tradition an understanding of the church which was slowly emerging also among Catholics through the nineteenth century. Johann Adam Möhler and the Catholic faculty at Tübingen are associated with the beginning of this movement which found prominent expression eventually in the documents of the Second Vatican Council.

In this study of John Nevin's ecclesiology the first chapter deals with the religious climate of America which in part formed him, and with the persons, ideas, and events which contributed to his reacting to that climate.

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[4]John Williamson Nevin, The Mystical Presence (Philadelphia, 1846), p. 3. A uniform system of punctuation is employed in this study, including citations from Nevin who displays a predisposition for capitalizing and punctuating unfamiliar to the contemporary reader.

In the second chapter Nevin's idea is developed that a Christology based on the apostles' creed leads to the concept of an historical church. The third chapter shows that the life embodied in the historical church is manifested and shared through its functions and sacraments; this is especially true of the eucharist, the study of which is the concern of chapter four. The pattern of historical development of the church toward unity will be treated in chapter five. A final chapter is devoted to a Roman Catholic evaluation of Nevin's ecclesiology in the light of Vatican II and contemporary theological developments. On the basis of the evaluation, the Epilogue suggests directions of ecumenical concern for the Catholic church.

CHAPTER I

BACKGROUND: GROWTH OF EVANGELICALISM IN AMERICA AND REACTIONARY INFLUENCES AT WORK IN JOHN NEVIN

In the hundred years between the beginning of the religious revival in America known as The Great Awakening and the arrival of John Nevin at Mercersburg in 1840, there was significant growth in an evangelical spirit within Protestantism. Great stress was laid upon the absolute need of God's saving grace in a personal religious experience; man's depravity came to be depicted as the result of his free action and his salvation, the result of his free acceptance of the gospel. New measures, often emotionally charged, were employed to bring about the all important conversion. In another development, the danger to religion from undisciplined frontier life provoked a massive effort by the churches in the period following the Revolutionary War directed at ministering to the western settlements. This resulted in muddying doctrine through the use of a hastily recruited and ill-prepared ministry and through stress upon the short range goal of the religious experience which precedes conversion. The revival became commonplace at the frontier as well as in the settled eastern towns; and with the revival the range of evangelicalism,

aided by the growth of Methodism, widened. No denomination was exempt from its effects; and with the stress it placed upon a personal religious experience, the sacramental aspect of religion became even less important than it had been. This was the brand of religion that John Nevin labeled "Puritanism." His writing attempted to redirect his own denomination and the churches at large to their sacramental and ecclesial heritage. In this he found support in the sacramental theology of the Reformed tradition which the churches in America had lost.

This chapter has two purposes. First it briefly outlines the theological tradition in which the majority of American churches had roots and toward which John Nevin was re-directing them. Secondly, it deals with the religious atmosphere in which Nevin was nurtured and with other circumstances in his life which contributed to his formation as a young man and then to his reformation and reaction in middle age.

1. The Reformed Tradition

The reformation movement led by Huldreich Zwingli (1484-1531) became linked early with the forces called forth by John Calvin (1509-1564); the result was a series of "Reformed" churches for whom John Calvin was the principal theologian.[1] John Knox was largely a disciple

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[1]For an introduction to the thought of Calvin see A Compend of the Institutes of the Christian Religion by John Calvin, ed. by Hugh Thompson Kerr, Jr. (Philadelphia, 1939) and On the Christian Faith, Selections from the Institutes, Commentaries, and Tracts, ed. with an Introduction by John T. McNeill (New York, 1957). For various aspects of Calvin's thought see

of Calvin and the Church of Scotland became steeped in Calvin's theology. In England too his influence was widespread, and through the English Puritans the theology of Calvin first made its way to America. He was for most Puritans of the period before Jonathan Edwards (1703-1758) an "almost indisputable authority."[2]

In John Calvin's theology the theme of salvation is central.[3] Without regard for man's worthiness (he is alienated by sin and depraved) God saves whomever he has elected to life. But not all men share in the salvation of God, and Calvin was so captured by God's sovereign sway over all things that he saw his will active in this as well. Scripture is the test of all doctrine about God's saving plan which centers in Christ. Christ is, then, central in all of Calvin's thinking. Through his grace alienated man may be reconciled to God. The sacraments have an important place in Calvin's scheme, for through these sacramental signs representing the grace of Christ proclaimed in the Word, salvation may be effected through faith

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Emile Doumerque, Jean Calvin, les hommes et les choses de son temps, 7 vols. (Lausanne, 1899-1927), especially vols. IV and V; Edward A. Dowey, Jr., The Knowledge of God in Calvin's Theology (New York, 1952); John T. McNeill, The History and Character of Calvinism (New York, 1954); Williston Walker, John Calvin, Organizer of Reformed Protestantism, 1509-1564 (New York, 1931); and R. S. Wallace, Calvin's Doctrine of the Word and Sacraments (London, 1953). For detailed bibliographies see John T. McNeill, "Thirty years of Calvin Study," Church History, 17 (1948), 207-240; and Edward A. Dowey, Jr., "Continental Reformation: Works of General Interest, Studies in Calvin and Calvinism since 1948," ibid., 24 (1955), 360-67 and his bibliography under the same title, but since 1955 in ibid., 29 (1960), 187-204.

[2]John T. McNeill in the Introduction to On the Christian Faith, p. xxviii.

[3]The summary of Calvin's theology in the following paragraph is based on McNeill, ibid., pp. xviii-xxviii.

by the working of the Spirit. Man can receive all that these sacramental signs represent; thus in the sacrament of the supper, there is a communication of the body and blood of the Lord in a spiritual manner. The Holy Catholic Church of the Creed is equated with the "communion of saints," the elect of all time and of all places who are known only to God. The church of the creed is not then a visible organization. The visible church only imperfectly represents it and is in constant need of reform to bring it into accord with the true invisible church of those who are saved. A branch of the true visible church is known by its marks: the Word rightly preached, the sacraments rightly administered, and sound discipline by which these are maintained.

The influence of Calvin in America was mainly through the Westminster Confession of 1646 which was the theological foundation of Presbyterianism and later of Congregationalism and of the Baptists. When the Pilgrim Congregationalists adopted it in 1648, they excepted its church polity and stressed the independence of local churches whose members would enter the community covenant when they had experienced a datable conversion. The Westminster Confession was a statement of Calvinism which stressed divine sovereignty and human depravity but which modified pure Calvinism by softening predestination and placing more stress on man's responsibility through fulfilling his part in a

covenant relationship with God.[4] In Nevin's opinion the Confession was not free from ambiguity in its sacramental language as compared with the Reformed confessions of the sixteenth century. It reflected a principle which was unfavorable to the objective and mystical in the life of the church.[5]

The German Reformed Church with which Nevin became associated in 1840 received its Reformed tradition by a different route. Its theology was based upon the altered Augsburg Confession known as the variata, authored by Philip Melancthon and subscribed to by Calvin. The Heidelberg Catechism of 1563, the doctrinal compendium of the German Reformed Church, was "designed to interpret . . . the Augsburg Confession; to explain the sense in which it was held by the Church in the Palatinate."[6] Reflecting the influence of Melancthon, the Catechism is silent on the question of predestination but incorporates Calvin's sacramental doctrine. Regarding the former, early in his Mercersburg

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[4]The Confession may be found in A Harmony of the Westminster Presbyterian Standards with notes by James Benjamen Green (Richmond, 1951). The modifications made by the Congregationalists are found in Williston Walker, The Creeds and Platforms of Congregationalism (New York, 1893); and the Baptist version is in W. L. Lumpkin, Baptist Confessions of Faith (Philadelphia, 1959). The Puritan modification of Calvinistic theology by using the idea of covenant, while still retaining "in form at least" the essential structure of Calvinism, is treated in Perry Miller, Errand into the Wilderness (Cambridge, Mass., 1956), Chapter III, "The Marrow of Puritan Divinity."

[5]Mystical Presence, pp. 96, 97.

[6]Nevin, The History and Genius of the Heidelberg Catechism (Chambersburg, Pa., 1847), pp. 142-43.

career Nevin himself abandoned the predestinarianism he had brought with him from his Presbyterian past. Perhaps his analysis of the Heidelberg Catechism in a series of articles from 1840-42 in the Weekly Messenger influenced his change of view. Eventually, he adopted the position that Melancthon was the principle theological force of the German Reformed Church and not, as that church was accustomed to think, Zwingli, who tended toward a memorialism in sacramental theology. The departure by the German Reformed Church from the sacramental doctrine of the sixteenth century reflected a widespread defection in this respect which was not confined to any particular country or religious confession. In re-directing the German Reformed Church to its theological roots summarized in the Melancthonian influenced Heidelberg Catechism, Nevin was reflecting his concern that Protestantism in America had, to a great extent, abandoned its tradition.

2. New England Theology

The brand of religion which Nevin attacked as "Puritanism" was an evangelicalism which stressed personal religious experience to the detriment of sacramental and ecclesial doctrine. Conversion and consequent zeal as evidence of it were its two poles. He was formed in that tradition and he was writing about himself when he confessed that "the hardest Puritan we have to do with always is the one we carry, by birth and education, in our own bosom."[7]

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[7]"Puritanism and the Creed," Mercersburg Review, 1 (1849), 602.

Evangelicalism was a new surge of life in American Protestantism associated with the Great Awakening.[8] It spread throughout the colonies touching every area and class of people.[9] More an emphasis than a theological system, evangelicalism's stress was on the importance of personal religious experience in response to the grace of the sovereign God. Only in New England was a theology formulated in conjunction with the Awakening. It emerged under the influence of Jonathan Edwards (1703-

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[8]The slow intellectual and spiritual preparation for the Awakening is depicted in Perry Miller, The New England Mind: From Colony to Province (Cambridge, Mass., 1953) and the traits of Puritanism which encouraged evangelical religion are subjected to analysis in Herbert Wallace Schneider, The Puritan Mind (New York, 1930). An overall view of the Awakening is given in Joseph Tracy, The Great Awakening, A History of the Revival of Religion in the Time of Edwards and Whitefield (Boston, 1842). The great preacher of the Awakening is presented in a critical and balanced study by Stuart Clark Henry, George Whitefield, Wayfaring Witness (New York and Nashville, 1957); an older but still authoritative source for Whitefield is Luke Tyermann, The Life of the Rev. George Whitefield, (New York, 1877) 2 vols. A general view of the Awakening's impact on American life is in Thomas Cuming Hall, The Religious Background of American Culture (Boston, 1930) particularly chapter 12.

[9]The deep effects of the Awakening on New England life are related in Edwin S. Gaustad, The Great Awakening in New England (New York, 1957). The pietist influence on the Awakening is described in Lawrence E. Brynestead, "The Great Awakening in the New England and Middle Colonies," Journal of the Presbyterian Historical Society, vol. 14, no. 2 (June, 1930), 80-91; no. 3 (Sept., 1930), 104-41. The Presbyterian character of the movement is related in Thomas Stacey Capers, "The Great Awakening in the Middle Colonies," ibid., vol. 8, no. 7 (Sept., 1916), 296-315. The revivalist movements prior to 1740, those of the pietists in Pennsylvania, of Frelinghuysen and of the Tennents are described in Charles Hortshorn Maxson, The Great Awakening in the Middle Colonies (Chicago, 1920).

1758) and his disciples, the Edwardseans as they came to be called.[10]

The Edwardseans defended the truth that God's grace alone effects man's redemption at a time when man of the eighteenth century was growing ever more conscious of his human capacity. The followers of Edwards opposed all attempts to substitute the moral attainment of man for God's gift of righteousness. Man is depraved and his depravity is self-love, wrote Samuel Hopkins (1721-1803), one of the Edwardseans. Regenerated man must give indication of his conversion from self love, therefore, by means of works of love for others out of a "disinterested benevolence," a concern for the greatest welfare of the greatest number. As it developed, the theology of the Edwardseans gave support to the revivals by an intellectual restatement of ideas which they felt had been verified by the Awakening: a sense of the need for and experience of conversion and of personal response to God's freely offered gift. From this Edwardsean camp came the founders of Andover Seminary, established in 1808 as a center of orthodoxy in reaction to the liberal and rationalistic Harvard.

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[10]Joseph Haroutunian, Piety versus Moralism: The Passing of the New England Theology (New York, 1932), favorably reviews the theology of the Edwardseans; for another view, see Frank Hugh Foster, A Genetic History of the New England Theology (Chicago, 1907). For the biography of Edwards, see Ola E. Winslow, Jonathan Edwards, 1703-1750 (New York, 1940); and for his thought see Perry Miller, Jonathan Edwards (New York, 1949).

The liberal forces associated with Harvard had contributed to the rise of Unitarianism, with its optimistic view of man, and to Universalism, with its affirmation of universal salvation. The latter was the counterpart of Unitarianism among the less urbane classes. These forces continued to exert influence within the churches, and eventually the traditional teaching of limited atonement for the elect gave way to the concept of the offer of atonement for all men. This more optimistic view of life spread within Congregational-Presbyterian circles through the liberal teaching of Nathaniel W. Taylor (1786-1858) at Yale.[11]

Taylor considered himself in the tradition of Jonathan Edwards. He wanted to restate Calvinism to make its concepts consistent with a practical theology of the revival of the Second Awakening as the followers of Edwards had done for the Great Awakening. By Taylor's time the revival had become a full-blown feature of American Protestantism. But as Taylor interpreted orthodoxy, man's depravity was the result of his own actions. In a sermon in 1828, which split Congregationalism and had wide repercussions within Presbyterianism, Taylor virtually repudiated the doctrine of election. Sin is man's own act, "consisting in a free choice of some object rather than God, as his chief good" or in a "free preference of the world and of worldly good, to the will and glory of God."[12] Men are

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[11] See Sydney E. Mead, Nathaniel W. Taylor (Chicago, 1942).

[12] A part of this sermon is reprinted in American Christianity: An Historical Interpretation with Representative Documents, ed. H. Shelton Smith, Robert T. Hardy, and Lefferts A. Loetscher (New York, 1960-63) II, 28-36.

fully responsible for their moral state, and their salvation depends upon their acceptance of the Gospel. Although circumstances of man's nature make it certain he will sin, he has power to the contrary.

The forces which created New England Theology crossed John Nevin's life, and it is with this influence that we shall now deal.

3. The Formation of John Nevin[13]

At the time Andover Seminary was founded in 1808 John Nevin was five years old and was already learning his Bible questions, a discipline which began, as he said, "as soon as I could speak."[14] He learned his doctrine from the Mother's Catechism and later from the Westminster Shorter Catechism. This kind of home instruction was part of the church system in the Scots-Irish presbytery of Carlisle, Pennsylvania in which Nevin was nurtured. The system emphasized the means of grace received through the church, the sacraments, the preached word, and a regime of instruction which included a weekly examination for young John at the parish school in Shippensburg. It was a regime which continued throughout life, and even adults were examined annually by the pastor on portions of the Larger Catechism.[15]

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[13]The outline of John Nevin's early years until 1840 is given in his autobiography, My Own Life (Lancaster, 1964), a reprint of a series by the same title in the Weekly Messenger, March-June, 1870. Incidents in his later life are sketchily presented in Theodore Appel, The Life and Work of John Williamson Nevin (Phila., 1889).

[14]Nevin, My Own Life, p. 4.

[15]Ibid.

The Great Awakening had affected the Carlisle presbytery, and the Middle Spring church of which the Nevins were members had supported the evangelical or "new side" in a controversy over revivalism in the mid-eighteenth century. Perhaps the effects of the movement's evangelical zeal for moral causes is reflected in Nevin's concern for abolitionism and the temperance movement which he learned from his father. But the Awakening had not had the effect upon church life in the Scots-Irish country to the degree that it had in New England and in areas affected by the theological reflection of the Edwardseans. For this reason the emphasis upon conversion in New England Theology in its developed form caused Nevin great shock when he first encountered it at college.[16]

In 1817, at age fourteen, John enrolled at Union College in Schenectedy, New York, in an area where the Presbyterians and Congregationalists were working amicably under the Plan of Union of 1801. The Plan's designer, in fact, had been Jonathan Edwards, Jr. when he was President of the College. During the late Colonial period increasing cooperation was evident between the Presbyterians and Congregationalists, and there was even free movement by ministers between the churches in both New England and the Middle Colonies. Following the Revolution, the two groups took steps to strengthen their tie. The Plan of Union was the result, allowing for union churches on the frontier and other joint ventures. Their action reflected the kind of

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[16] Ibid., pp. 9-10.

inter-denominational cooperation that was widespread in America. Union College itself was an example. Nevin notes that Union was organized "on the principle of representing the collective christianity of the so-called evangelical denominations."[17]

At Union College young John first met with "the genius of New England Puritanism, in its character of contradiction to the old Reformed faith."[18] It was not the faith he had been baptized into in its Presbyterian form. As he reflected fifty years later on what he had encountered, he thought that it was based on the principle that "regeneration and conversion lay outside the church, had nothing to do with baptism and Christian education."[19] In his third year at college he himself was brought to experience a conversion when Asahel Nettleton, a revivalist preacher, came to Union. Of his kind of conservative approach to the revival, "genuine revivals," Nevin would speak favorably twenty years later in The Anxious Bench. The latter was written to stem the spread of "new measures" revivalism which used radical means to exert conversion and which was infiltrating the German churches in Pennsylvania. What he genuinely abhorred in the brand of religion he met with first at Union College was its reliance upon an extra-ecclesial, extra-sacramental

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[17] Ibid., p. 8.

[18] Ibid.

[19] Ibid., p. 10.

system which made one look upon himself as "an outcast from the family and kingdom of God" before he could come to be in either in the "right way."[20] That kind of religion was beginning to take hold at home in Pennsylvania even during Nevin's collegiate period. His recollection was that by 1821 change in the presbytery of Carlisle was already taking place, "a slow process of Puritanization was going forward."[21]

Illness kept Nevin from continuing his education beyond college until 1823 when he entered Princeton Theological Seminary, still unsure whether, despite his interest in the ministry, he should proceed to ordination. By the time he entered, Princeton had become "the theological Athens of the Presbyterian Church."[22] It was the rival of Andover although it had been established for only a decade. Charles Hodge, newly appointed to the third professorship at Princeton in 1822, was to become the chief opponent of Nevin twenty-five years later. Hodge joined two other Professors, Samuel Miller and Archibald Alexander, "the two best qualified men in the whole Presbyterian Church."[23] Princeton theology under these three took the form of seventeenth-century scholastic Calvinism which they vigorously defended against New England deviations. Biblical interpretation at Princeton followed

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[20] Ibid., p. 9.

[21] Ibid., p. 14.

[22] Ibid., p. 39.

[23] Ibid., p. 20.

Moses Stuart of Andover who had brought to America the biblicism and rational approach of the German school represented by the popular Biblical Theology of Storr and Flatt. The latter was translated in 1826 by Samuel S. Schmucker of the Lutheran Seminary at Gettysburg under the auspices of Andover Seminary. It was widely used in America. The ecumenical nature of that transaction reveals to a degree the spirit of the times, for Schmucker had been a student at Princeton and though nominally a Lutheran, he was in fact in the Reformed tradition and taught a Zwinglian memorialism in the eucharist. Nevin recalled that his translation "found quite a patronage among us at Princeton."[24]

The "religious" spirit at Princeton Theological Seminary reflected not the seventeenth century but the nineteenth. It was caught up in the Second Awakening, and that movement's deeply introspective bent, and emphasis on personal religious experience exercised an influence on Nevin which he was not able to discard until his time at the Seminary was nearing an end.[25] The difficulty, as he analyzed it later, was that "our teaching was not steadily and consistently in one direction;" instruction was according to seventeenth century scholastic Calvinism, but "the tide of actual living" was "another way."[26] Few of the students cared for the teaching of the Reformed Church in the seventeenth century.

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[24] Ibid., p. 106.

[25] Ibid., p. 23.

[26] Ibid.

While at Princeton Nevin was Hodge's student, and he subsequently substituted for his master as instructor in biblical studies from 1826-1828 while Hodge studied abroad. Nevin's A Summary of Biblical Antiquities, the product of these years of work, reveals the kind of covenant theology Nevin was immersed in during his Princeton period. Upon Hodge's return in 1828, Nevin accepted a position at the proposed Western Seminary in Pittsburgh which was to continue the spirit of Princeton in the Alleghenies. He went to Western in late 1829 ~~as~~ a conservative evangelical formed by Princeton scholasticism, an advocate of private judgment of the Bible, and in the evangelical spirit, an outspoken supporter of moral causes and voluntary societies. In the pages of The Friend, a newspaper he edited for the "Young Men's Society of Pittsburgh and Vicinity," Nevin wrote extensively about missionary societies, Bible societies, Sabbath keeping, temperance, and abolition. It was, in fact in protest over the latter issue's repression in the columns of The Friend that Nevin resigned in 1835 as its editor. In that year too he finally decided to be ordained, "set apart in full to the ministry, by the laying on of hands of the Presbytery of Ohio."[27]

In 1837 Nevin still reflected conservative Calvinist leanings; he was old school in his theology, deploring the spread of "new schoolism even in our orthodox region."[28] New school theologians were Presby-

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[27] Ibid., p. 78.

[28] Christian Herald, October 19, 1837 as cited in Nichols, Romanticism in American Theology, p. 33.

terians who had been affected by the theology of Nathaniel Taylor. The rumblings in Congregationalism against Taylor's liberal views, which have been referred to in the previous section, were echoed in Presbyterianism. Old school conservatives lined up against the new theology men.[29] But the old school had not sufficient strength to take action against the liberals in the General Assembly until 1837. However, the founding of Union Theological Seminary in New York City by new school men in 1836 brought reaction in the General Assembly of the following year. Until that time the balance of power was in the hands of the faculty at Princeton which considered itself the bastion of orthodoxy, but in this matter had not yet clearly taken sides. However, the faculty had not looked with favor upon the establishing of Lane Theological Seminary in Cincinnati, Ohio in 1829 with a Taylorite as President. And now the founding of liberal Union Theological was regarded as a challenge to Princeton's role in the church. The faculty of Princeton Seminary lent its weight to the old school in the Assembly. In 1837 the General Assembly dissolved the Plan of Union established in 1801 with the Congregationalists and expelled four new school dominated synods of the Union from the church.

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[29]The conflict is described in Robert E. Thompson, A History of the Presbyterian Church (New York, 1895), pp. 102-149. Documents concerning it are reproduced in The Presbyterian Enterprise: Sources of American Presbyterian History, ed. M. W. Armstrong, L. A. Loetscher, and C. A. Anderson (Phila., 1956), pp. 146-71.

While Nevin objected to what he considered an illegal action in the dismissal of the four synods, he had, in fact, deplored the spread of new school theology. He belonged "theoretically and experimentally to the old school in theology" as he had belonged to it "theoretically at least" from his childhood.[30] He had not consciously changed his theological position when in 1839 he resigned from Western Seminary, discouraged by its dragging financial operations which he felt would lead to its demise in a few years. In 1840 Nevin accepted a professorship at Mercersburg, encouraged by the view of President Alexander of Princeton that he was transferring from one branch of the reformed tradition to another, from old school Presbyterianism to the German Reformed Church in America. He went to Mercersburg intending to teach the same old school orthodoxy he had supported at Princeton and at Western.

But the germ of change had been at work in Nevin during those years at Pittsburgh. Among the elements seeding his change one must surely reckon the influence of Samuel Taylor Coleridge who helped him break with the grammatical and historical emphasis of biblical interpretation he knew from Princeton. From Coleridge, whom he read and whom he published in The Friend, he learned an interior interpretation of the bible through the heart. For Coleridge the validity of spiritual truths was determined not by an intellectual process, but by the degree in which

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[30] Christian Herald, October 12, 1837 as cited in Nichols, ibid., p. 33.

these truths meet man's moral needs. It is a view similar to Schleiermacher's principle that das fromme Gottesbewusstein is the source of religious truth. Nevin would have occasion later to state the influence of Schleiermacher upon his thinking through the writing of German theologians.[31] Coleridge and Schleiermacher both taught him that kind of appeal to the interior which he loved to find in his favorite devotional manual, the Imitation of Christ. When he meditated upon it, he once wrote, how poor seemed "all merely outward modes of mastering the sense of the Bible."[32]

Nevin's view of religion was further shaped by the practical divinity of the seventeenth century, by the Puritan mystics and Platonists he had come to know. Thus, the thought of John Howe, whose works were reissued in his Pittsburgh period, especially took hold of him. Henry Scougall's Life of God in the Soul of Man, also newly issued in 1834, was commended by Nevin for its theme of religion as a new life, as growth in holiness, as something much more than a doctrine or a passing experience. Another influence was what he considered the profound spirituality of Archbishop Leighton who shared the theology of Scougall. In their style of religion he found an objectivity which was missing in the evangelical, personal religion popular at the time. What he found in these seventeenth

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[31] Antichrist or the Spirit of Sect and Schism (New York, 1848), p. 4.

[32] My Own Life, p. 127.

century mystics and Platonists "had to do with ideas at least which were held to be of objective force."[33]

John Nevin was wont to express his new appreciation of religion in the biological analogy of organic life. The Friend carried a series by him in 1834-35 on that theme. Religion was both an experience beyond doctrine and a life which could gradually change and develop. It has been suggested that Nevin's grievance against the new school theology in Presbyterianism apparently came chiefly at this point, its failure to accept religion as life and experience, rather than in its supposed Arminian tendency.[34] Between 1837 and his resignation at Western Seminary, Dr. Nevin wrote a series on "Faith" in which he criticized the rigid acceptance by Presbyterianism of a lifeless expression of faith. True faith, he wrote, was more than a matter of intellectual opinion, whether accepted on authority or based on evidence. True faith joined the person and the object at a deeper, affectual level.[35] The will and affections are brought into harmony with the truth. No doubt he had felt the influence of Schleiermacher through his reading of Coleridge and, as we shall see, through Augustus Neander, the historian.

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[33] Ibid., p. 122.

[34] J. H. Nichols, Romanticism in American Theology (Chicago, 1961), p. 41.

[35] The series on "Faith" from the Presbyterian Advocate were reprinted in the Weekly Messenger in February-March, 1840.

"No doubt I owe much to Schleiermacher," Nevin wrote in response to his former professor, Charles Hodge, who had criticized his dependence upon the German. Nevin read widely in the German theologians of the nineteenth century many of whom had been influenced by Schleiermacher. It was through them that Nevin was affected by the great opponent of the Enlightenment. Nevin admitted his debt to Schleiermacher particularly on two points: first, for considering the person of Christ, rather than his doctrine or work, as the ultimate fact of Christianity; and secondly, for describing the supernatural life as an organic union with Christ.[37] Both of these ideas are prominent features of the theology developed at Mercersburg. To some extent it was in Augustus Neander (1789-1850) that Nevin discovered Schleiermacher.

Neander, the German church historian whose patristic studies influenced the Catholic Johann Adam Möhler and in whose school Nevin's fellow professor, Philip Schaff, considered himself, had an astounding influence upon Nevin. At Pittsburgh he had learned German in order to read Neander. The latter, like Schleiermacher his teacher, considered religion as a life and an experience of Christ more than doctrine. It was communion with unseen reality. But above all it was Neader's "new views

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[36] Antichrist or the Spirit of Sect and Schism (New York, 1848), p. 4.

[37] Ibid., p. 6.

of history" which John Nevin remembered in 1870 as having had the greatest influence upon him. "They broke up my dogmatic slumbers."[38]

In learning history at Princeton Nevin had used a book by Johann Lorentz von Mosheim (1694-1755), a German Lutheran who conceived of doctrine as a final, unalterable system from the apostolic age. At Western Seminary when Nevin began to teach history in 1837, he resorted to Mosheim "according to the fashion which then prevailed in our American schools of divinity generally."[39] He felt that he lacked sufficient depth in Neander to use him. In Mosheim's perspective there had been little but corruption of the truth between the first and the sixteenth centuries, and he had no concept of history as having development or direction. But quite the opposite was true of Neander. In his writing, even in the rise and progress of heresies "there was seen to be both meaning and method."[40] Under Neander's aegis Nevin first learned to "reverence and regard" the old Christian Fathers who were to have great influence upon his view of the church, and the first book he read in German was Neander on Tertullian.[41]

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[38] My Own Life, p. 143.

[39] Ibid., p. 145.

[40] Ibid., p. 141.

[41] Ibid., pp. 140-41.

For all his new vision of history Nevin was still affected by the anti-Romanism abroad in America in the thirties and forties. The papal period was for him still the "great apostacy." He referred frequently to "the man of Sin" in connection with the Pope and to the "Moloch of Popery."[42] The title "Antichrist" was reserved for the papacy as late as, but for the last time in, 1844.[43] It is not without significance that Philip Schaff arrived in that year from Germany bringing his broader conception of church history to the Mercersburg movement. Subsequently Nevin's anti-Romanism subsides.

Finally, in listing influences upon Nevin, one must mention his brief but important encounter with Friedrich Augustus Rauch who was teaching Hegelian idealism to the Seminary students when Dr. Nevin arrived at Mercersburg in 1840. Rauch's book, Psychology, the second edition of which Nevin edited in 1841 soon after the author's death, provided the new professor with a framework for his sacramental views.[44] Rauch discussed the related ideas of life, personality, and the relation of soul and body which Nevin seemed to be using in connection with the theological questions of incarnation, mystical union of the believer with

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[42]See, for example, the series, "The Heidelberg Catechism," in the Weekly Messenger, 1840-42.

[43]In "Catholic Unity," a sermon delivered in Harrisburg on August 8, 1844. It is reprinted in Philip Schaff, The Principle of Protestantism (Chambersburg, 1845), pp. 193-215.

[44]For this influence, see a discussion of the Lord's Supper in the Weekly Messenger, April 27, 1842.

the risen Christ, and Christ's real presence in the eucharist. No mere moral union, the incorporation of a believer into Christ joined him to the life and the total person of the glorified Christ through eucharistic reception.

By 1840 when Nevin arrived at Mercersburg, the nineteenth-century revival movement with its employment of "new measures" was accelerating toward its mid-century peak and was contributing to the popular definition of religion and of the church. The following section treats this development.

4. The Second Great Awakening.[45]

Timothy Dwight (1752-1817), who revived religion at Yale while serving as its President, wrote in a letter to a contemporary that the

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[45]For a general account of the revival, see B. A. Weisberger, They Gathered at the River (Boston, 1958). The spirituality growing out of the frontier environment and the use of the revival is treated in William Warren Sweet, Religion in the Development of American Culture, 1765-1840 (New York, 1952), Chapters 4 and 5; also see his Revivalism in America (New York, 1944). Lack of liturgical and ecclesiastical form and the spontaneous, emotional nature of expression in revivalism is described in Catherine C. Cleveland, The Great Revival in the West, 1797-1805 (Chicago, 1916). The revival as a source for moral improvement and the development of the camp meeting up to 1840 are treated in Charles A. Johnson, The Frontier Camp Meeting, Religion's Harvest Time (Dallas, 1955). For changes in theology and preaching brought by the awakening started by Timothy Dwight in 1798, see The Second Great Awakening in Connecticut (New Haven, 1942). For another sectional treatment dealing with western New York and giving major attention to Charles Finney, consult Whitney R. Cross, The Burnt-over District: The Social and Intellectual History in Western New York, 1800-1850 (Cornell, 1950).

Revolutionary War had unhinged the principle, morality, and religion of the country more than a peace of forty years could have done. The period following immediately upon the Revolution was a time of diminished religious spirit. Liberal tendencies, already dealt with in another section, had crept into organized religion. Congregationalist orthodoxy in New England was carrying the seed of Unitarianism and Universalism which came to life soon after the turn of the century. And attack upon revealed religion by Deism was particularly aggressive up until the beginning of the nineteenth century. Deism had been a pastime of an educated elite prior to the War, but it was turned into a popular movement among the masses after Independence through the work of pamphleteers following the success of the Revolution in France where Deism was rampant. It steadily won favor in America, so that few colleges had failed to succumb to its appeal.

The danger to religious discipline manifest in Deism was matched with a decline in morals. On the frontier especially was this so, for there the wild existence facing the pioneer was a natural deterrent to inhibitions. This danger, "barbarism" as it came to be called, was a problem growing from the exodus to the West which by the 1790's was of stampede proportion. With the movement West came the fear that absence from the Christianizing influence of eastern communities would cause a de-christianized society to grow in tandem with the soon-to-be politically strong West.[46]

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[46]For the development and employment of the united front against anti-religious forces, see Charles I. Foster, An Errand of Mercy: The

The counter-offensive of Protestant churches against the threat of Deism and barbarism was led initially by Congregationalists and Presbyterians, who emerged from the Revolutionary War as the strongest bodies in America in numerical strength, leadership, and prestige. But both soon ceded leadership to the Methodists and Baptists who were inventive and energetic. The latter tended to relegate to the background the doctrine of election and to stress salvation for all men who sought it through vital faith and works. Above all the Methodists and Baptists made efficacious use of an emotional revivalism which the older churches for a long while repudiated. By 1850, however, all denominations had adopted to some extent the evangelical methods successfully employed by the Methodists and Baptists.

The scattered instances of revivals at the close of the Revolutionary War grew into a movement which was to storm the country for two generations after 1800. The Second Great Awakening with increasing tempo worked its way South and then from the excitement of the camp meeting in Kentucky and Tennessee into the Carolinas and northward to

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Evangelical United Front (Chapel Hill, N. C., 1954). For two general accounts of the voluntary societies rising to the challenge, see O. W. Elsbree, The Rise of the Missionary Spirit in America, 1790-1815 (Williamsport, Pa., 1928) and G. B. Goodykoontz, Home Missions on the American Frontier (Caldwell, Idaho, 1939). Detailed denominational contribution is found in William Warren Sweet, Religion on the American Frontier, The Baptists (New York, 1931), The Presbyterians (New York, 1936), The Congregationalists (Chicago, 1939), The Methodists (Chicago, 1946).

Pennsylvania and Ohio and upper New York. Then it moved into more sedate surroundings at New Haven where a significant revival was held in 1802 by Timothy Dwight with, it is reported, one-third of the Yale students converting. Dwight was a respected Edwardsean Calvinist and Yale a respected institution; through the interest shown there the revival spread to other campuses. Amherst, Dartmouth, and Williams had similar awakenings. In this way leadership for the movement was recruited. At Yale, Nathaniel W. Taylor, who became the architect of the theology which defended the movement in its later stages, and Lyman Beecher, the Taylorite who became President of the Presbyterian Lane Theological Seminary in Cincinnati in 1829, were both won to the cause.

In the Second Great Awakening a distinct difference in procedure over the revivals preached in the First Awakening was introduced. When the Edwardseans of the First Awakening preached they depended upon the faithful presentation of God's word to prepare the way for the gift of the Spirit. In the preaching of the new Awakening, however, more preachers purposely tried to provoke a revival by employing whatever measures they could to cause hearers to decide for God. As Lyman Beecher put it, preachers were "no longer to trust Providence and expect God will vindicate his cause" if they neglected the use of "appropriate means."[47] This was true both East and West. If there was a difference in style, it

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[47]As cited in Hudson, American Protestantism (Chicago, 1961), p. 80.

was due to the more marked emotionalism found in western revivals, especially in the southerly regions among the unlettered.

Among Presbyterians and Congregationalists there was considerable alarm about the narrowing gap between Calvinism and Arminianism.[48] Nathaniel Taylor's rejection of the traditional view of man's depravity and his insistence on the freedom of man convinced conservatives that he had abandoned orthodoxy. The "new measures" used by the controversial revivalist, Charles Finney (1792-1875), to acquire conversion seemed to those concerned about orthodoxy as the practical outcome of Taylor's emphasis on man's work in salvation.[49]

Finney knew how to translate Taylorism into understandable terms. Trained as a lawyer, he used the tactics of a lawyer to "win" cases. Those who were guilty were brought forward to the "anxious bench," a front pew serving as a kind of witness stand, there to be examined and to confess sorrow. Finney's success was due to his ability, as he put it, to distract attention from the world, to attract attention to religion, and to present the claims of Christianity with telling power.

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[48]Jacobus Arminius (1560-1609) directed an attack against the Calvinistic unconditional election and emphasized instead the universal grace of God as an invitation to man's free acceptance. Arminian tendencies in theology have placed a low estimate on the means of grace and great emphasis on subjectivism.

[49]For the method of Finney, see W. R. Cross, The Burnt-over District: The Social and Intellectual History in Western New York, 1800-1850 (Cornell, 1950).

There was a stress in the revival religion of the nineteenth century, as there had been in the eighteenth, translating faith into action. Voluntary societies on a vast scale grew up with wide-ranging cooperation between evangelical denominations.[50] If conversion were genuine it would be expressed in action. That was the practical outcome of the theory of "disinterested benevolence" which had been elaborated by Samuel Hopkins and then by Nathaniel Taylor. If sin is selfishness, a preference for one's own interest in choices, then, so the theory goes, conversion should shift preferences toward a disinterested concern for others. Nevin was expressing this kind of evangelical zeal when he used the pages of The Friend in the early 1830's to promote a wide variety of causes.[51] There was a great deal of cooperation across denominational lines in both the revival itself and in the operation of the voluntary societies which resulted from renewed zeal. A significant consequence of such cooperation was a blurring of doctrinal distinctions among denominations and the creation of a common denominator in evangelicalism. It was a fact that at the height of Nevin's career in 1850 "in the great bulk of American Protestantism an 'evangelical' understanding of the faith had gradually supplanted the traditional sacramental outlook."[52]

[50]See footnote 46.

[51]My Own Life, pp. 83-85; 87-95.

[52]Sidney E. Mead, "The Rise of the Evangelical Conception of the Ministry in America: 1607-1850" in The Ministry in Historical Perspectives, ed. Helmut Richard Niebuhr and Daniel D. Williams (New York, 1956), p. 208.

By the 1830's Congregationalism had split over Taylor, and the concern for doctrinal purity had been a factor in the break between old school and new in Presbyterianism over infiltrating Taylorism. Charles Finney, who popularized the thought of Taylor, preached in the Methodist style in Presbyterian and Congregational pulpits. It was this kind of Methodistic evangelicalism that made older denominations nervous. They themselves had experienced an evangelical fervor from The Great Awakening. But as it was experienced in the eighteenth century, evangelicalism had been a new heart and a new vitality for a tired Puritanism. It was a stress upon personal religious experience, an emphasis more than a theological system, with the Reformed confessions always assumed as norms. But in the beginning of the nineteenth century, two strands of evangelicalism emerged, a conservative Puritan-Calvinistic strand and an enthusiastic Methodist one. Then during the 1830's this distinction gradually disappeared until by mid-century evangelical Protestantism could be described in Methodist terms.[53] There was such change that the staid Princeton Review could publish an article stating that it was necessary for all progressive churches to preach as if they believed sinners "to be possessed of all the powers of moral agency, capable of turning to God, and on this account, and no other, inexcusable

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[53]For an understanding of the spirit of Methodism, see Wilfred R. Wilkinson, Religious Experience: The Methodist Fundamental (London, 1928) and Lee Umphrey, John Wesley and Modern Religion (Nashville, Tenn., 1936).

for not doing so."[54] Even the revivalist, Charles Finney, would one day be defended in those pages.[55]

In some way the revival was adopted by all the denominations and it tended to influence both thought and organization. There was a tendency to oversimplify theological problems in the concentration upon conversion, and the nurture which a systematic church life could give was overlooked in favor of new measures which showed more immediate results. Taylor, with his emphasis on freedom, moved religion away from Calvinism toward an Arminian emphasis. There was a tendency to emphasize man's free acceptance of God's invitation, apart from the established means of grace. The role of the church was de-emphasized and its meaning distorted. As Nevin wrote, somewhat facetiously, in The Anxious Bench, it appears that it is the sinner who gets religion and not religion that gets the sinner.[56] An observer of American Protestantism capsuled the effect, by mid-nineteenth century, of the development of evangelicalism just described. He wrote:

> Broadly speaking its roots are Arminian rather than Calvinistic, it stresses Christian life (largely in terms of conversion and

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[54]Hudson calls attention to the curiosity of this statement by Robert Baird appearing in "of all places" the Princeton Review. See Religion in America, p. 179.

[55]The shift in old school opinion about the use of the revival is discussed in Elwyn A. Smith, The Presbyterian Ministry in American Culture (Philadelphia, 1962).

[56]The Anxious Bench, 2nd ed. (Chambersburg, 1844), p. 116.

> individualistic morals) rather than institutions, doctrines, and sacraments, and it conceives of Christianity more as an evangelistic movement than as a "church."[57]

John Nevin came to the German Reformed Church with the old school Presbyterian distrust of "new measures" revivalism which he had observed first hand in Pittsburgh when James Gallagher, a popular revivalist from the West, preached using the approach of Finney and employing the anxious bench. In Nevin's book such new measures were "quackery in the garb of religion without its inward life and power."[58] By the time he came to Mercersburg in 1840, the German Reformed Church had experienced some of this enthusiastic religion. Philip William Otterbein (1726-1813), employed some of the techniques of his Methodist friend, Francis Asbury who was the founder of circuit-riding ministering in America. In 1800, under Otterbein's leadership, the church of the United Brethren in Christ was launched, patterened after the polity and doctrine of Methodism. Another of what Nevin called "ranting sects" split off when John Winebrenner (1797-1860) from Harrisburg withdrew after being censured for his revivalist preaching in 1825. He incorporated the spirit of the "Christian movement," with its zeal for restoration of the primitive purity of the apostolic church, into the Church of God which he organized

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[57]Sidney E. Mead, "Professor Sweet's Religion and Culture in America," Church History, 22 (1953), 43.

[58]Nevin, The Anxious Bench, p. 52.

in 1830. Both new churches were known to Nevin for their fanaticism, Arminianism, and the use of an ignorant ministry.[59]

It was to alert the German Reformed Church of the danger of such enthusiastic religion that Nevin wrote The Anxious Bench in 1843. Lutherans in the eastern United States had already been infected by revivalism, and this with the commendation of Dr. Kurtz who was later an outspoken critic of Nevin on the eucharist. Kurtz's Lutheran Observer in Baltimore was a staunch defender of Charles Finney's new measures for winning cases for the Lord. These techniques had been largely avoided in the Congregational and Presbyterian churches, Nevin noted in his tract; conservative leaders of the mainstream of American Calvinism had repudiated Finney from the start. Reaction to Nevin's little book, then, was along predictable lines. The Methodists and other enthusiastic groups took exception to it along with the Lutheran Observer. In reply to the latter, Nevin wrote six articles in the Weekly Messenger in 1844, showing that the Lutheran tradition itself was at stake by its alliance with Finneyite revivalism. In the end it was theology which was at stake, a question of the Arminianism of New Haven theology which Finney's revivalism had ingested.[60]

A second edition of The Anxious Bench in 1844 substantially incorporated the six articles just referred to as written in defense of the first

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[59]Weekly Messenger, August 10 and 24, 1842.

[60]Ibid., Jan. 24, 1844.

edition, and it included a new chapter giving the author's view of a "system of the catechism" in contrast with the individualistic "system of the bench."[61] In this new chapter the doctrine of the church which would be associated with Mercersburg was germinally stated. Thus the church was described as source of life. Christianity was seen as a new life through union with Christ, "the organic root of the church." As real a bond is created with Christ as there is with Adam, the root of humanity. Through this union with Christ come life and salvation. Therefore, a collection of saved, isolated persons do not come together deciding to form a church but life comes through the church to individuals who then become associated with the community of the church. The church is not therefore a mere "aggregate of parts mechanically brought together," but a mother imparting life.[62]

The ideas presented in the chapter added to the new edition of The Anxious Bench were to be developed a few months later in the sermon, "Catholic Unity." It is from that point in Nevin's development that this formal study of his ecclesiology begins.

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[61] Chapter 7 explains the two systems.

[62] The Anxious Bench, pp. 125, 129. Nevin credits Ernst Sartorius (1797-1859), the German Lutheran theologian who had used the "two Adams" comparison in exploring imputation, p. 124. Nevin extended its implications for the doctrine of the Church.

CHAPTER II

THE CHURCH AND THE CHRISTOLOGY OF THE APOSTLES' CREED

It was axiomatic with John Nevin that any consideration of the church necessarily involved Christology just as any sound Christology involved the church. Christians, he said, who think that their faith can be complete or their religious system integral without the church "must have the mystery of the incarnation before their minds in some different way" from the manner expressed in the apostles' creed where his coming in the flesh "involves in the end the idea of the church."[1] It is this mystery of the incarnate Christ which "bears up in the end the entire superstructure of Christianity"[2] and which is "the fountainhead of the whole Christian redemption."[3] Therefore the view we have of the church will proceed from the one we have of Christ--"we come to a true conception of the church through a true and sound christology, and in no other way."[4]

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[1]"Thoughts on the Church," Mercersburg Review (hereafter cited as MR) 10 (1858), p. 419.

[2]"The Apostles' Creed," MR 1 (1849) 316.

[3]"Answer to Professor Dorner," MR 15 (1868), 613.

[4]"Wilberforce on the Incarnation," MR 2 (1850), 196.

Unorthodox views of the church, along with all heresy in Christianity, start with the mystery of the incarnation. No matter where the error may end, said Nevin, "it is sure to begin always, consciously or unconsciously" in a wrong view of this mystery.[5] "How clear it is to my mind," he once wrote to a friend, "that the whole sense and power of Christianity turn at last on the fact of the incarnation, as embodied with perennial life in the consciousness of the church. Apart from this all doctrine is cold and all practice dead."[6]

This chapter is divided into two parts. The first deals with the interrelation between the church and christology; and the second part, with the church and the apostles' creed which links christology and the church. Together the parts elaborate upon Nevin's thesis that the mystery of the incarnation, in the manner in which this is expressed in the apostles' creed, leads to the concept of the church.

Part A: The Church as a Function of Christology

1. Life in Christ

In a sermon entitled "Catholic Unity"[7] John Nevin developed a metaphor based upon organic life which he had presented in The Anxious

[5]"Thoughts on the Church," MR 10 (1858), 419.

[6]Unpublished letter, May 18, 1847 (Library of the Historical Society of the Evangelical and Reformed Church, Lancaster, Pa.). Cited in James Hastings Nichols, Romanticism in American Theology (Chicago, 1961), p. 144.

[7]Reprinted in The Mercersburg Theology, edited by James Hastings Nichols (New York, 1966).

Bench a few months before.[8] It is a vastly important idea for understanding his view of the relationship between Christ and the church, but not by any means an original one. He was undoubtedly familiar with an idea which had largely influenced Johann Adam Möhler's ecclesiology and which was the common property of German theology. The idea was familiar to him, as he admitted some five years later to his former teacher, Charles Hodge, from reading German theologians in whom he learned of Schleiermacher's notion of the supernatural life as organic life in Christ. At the writing of The Anxious Bench he was already long familiar with Neander, the German master of Philip Schaff, who applies the concept of biological organism to historical development. He further admits his debt to the German biblical commentator Hermann Olshausen and the theologian Ernst Sartorius who had used the two Adams theme to root humanity and the new creation, in Adam and Christ respectively, for an explanation of imputation. He extended the implications of the idea for the life of the church.

The occasion for "Catholic Unity" was the joint convention of the German Reformed Church and the Reformed Dutch Church in August, 1844, called to survey avenues of cooperation in home missions in the West and to explore the possibility of the union of the churches. As the leading figure on the faculty of the seminary of the German Reformed

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[8] In The Anxious Bench (Chambersburg, Pa., 1844).

Church, Nevin was invited to preach. He addressed himself to the ecumenical mood of the meeting.

Basing his remarks upon Ephesians 4:4-6, Nevin developed Paul's theme of unity and expressed it as realizable through sharing the one life of Christ imparted by means of the church. He portrayed the church in terms of organic life, comparing the union of christians with Christ to that of all men with Adam. Christ's generic life, his humanity, soul and body, "has passed over into our persons" so that the christian's life is "grounded in the life of Christ and so includes potentially all that belongs to this from the beginning."[9] What is in the root will pass to the branches, but it will pass through the church. All christians joined to the root and source of life are "vitally related and joined together as one great spiritual whole" which is the church. The union is an organic one and, as in all organic unions, the whole does not depend upon the parts for its existence. Therefore, the church, unlike other organizations, "does not rest upon its members, but the members rest upon the church."[10] Christ, like Adam, is the root of a race, of the new creation or redeemed humanity. He lives in his people by the life which fills his body, the church; and separated from this source of life, one cannot live as christian any more than an individual dissociated entirely from the human race would continue

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[9]"Catholic Unity," as reprinted in Nichols, The Mercersburg Theology, p. 40.

[10]Ibid.

to be a man. "We are not christians each one by himself and for himself, but we become such through the church."[11] Individual christianity apart from the organism is a "moral solecism" that necessarily destroys itself.

In the course of this ecumenically oriented sermon, themes of what came to be known as the Mercersburg Theology were outlined. Eventually this theology became the cause of cleavage between the Dutch and German churches. Nevin touched upon the analysis of the church as idea and actuality, the importance of the apostles' creed, and the sacraments, particularly the eucharist, as sources of grace. Philip Schaff, who had arrived in America less than two weeks before, was an interested listener to his future colleague. It was evident from the sermon that he and the preacher of "Catholic Unity" were already in substantial agreement. When Schaff's Das Prinzip des Protestantismus was translated by Nevin in 1845 for English readers, "Catholic Unity" was printed with it as an appendix at the request of the book's author. Although the sermon had been well received by the Dutch and German churches, a suspicion began to grow in both concerning the theological drift toward catholicism of Professors Nevin and Schaff as they began to expand upon the themes of the Mercersburg Theology. The Dutch were concerned enough to dash the hope which men like Nevin had for eventual reunion. Scrapped too were the interim plans of a joint convention committee under Nevin's chairmanship which had recommended a plan for unification in home

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[11] Ibid., p. 41.

missions in the West, a common text in theology for seminarians, and an effort at conformity in the liturgy.

Union with Christ which creates the church, the concern of "Catholic Unity," is described as a mystical union in Nevin's treatise on the eucharist published in 1846.[12] The purpose of the incarnation was to couple human nature in real union with the Logos as a permanent source of life. Only as the life may be considered imminent in our nature itself can it be imputed to us as ours. It is because humanity died and rose in Christ, just as it had fallen in the person of Adam, that the life which is salvation was introduced into the center of humanity. The new life is a truly human life, Christ's life passing over to his people constituting in this way the church.

Developing the theme of "Catholic Unity" further, Nevin described the process by which union with Christ is accomplished as organic, that is, as taking place by way of history, growth, and regular life development. This communication of his own life to man is the mystical union, the basis of our salvation, and the seed of our sanctification. Though the hypostatic union remains limited to his own person, all Christians have part in Christ's divinity. The whole Christ lives and works in the church, supernaturally, mysteriously, yet really and truly.[13]

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[12] The Mystical Presence (Philadelphia, 1846).

[13] Ibid., pp. 164 ff. where Nevin summarizes the meaning of mystical union.

The reality of the presence to which we have just referred makes Christianity itself a life. Christ's life flows from Christ to his people who "do not simply bear his name, and acknowledge his doctrine . . . [but] are so united with him as to have part in the substance of his life itself."[14] Made a quickening spirit, "Christ has life in himself absolutely; and under this substantial form, it is made to reach over from him to the church."[15] The church can no more be separated from his person than the life of Adam carried forward by natural generation is separated from him. Christ lives in his people to the end of time as a "quickening spirit." "He is present with them, and mystically joined to them, in the form of life."[16] Since Pentecost, the life in Christ "has continued regularly active in the world by means of the church, which is itself the product and extension in this way of the new creation, commencing in the Saviour's person."[17] Christ then became for others what he had become within himself, "a quickening or life giving spirit"; from him "the power of a new creation was to be carried forward under the same form, in the world, by the church."[18]

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[14] Ibid., p. 218.

[15] Ibid.

[16] Ibid., p. 221.

[17] Ibid., p. 222.

[18] Ibid., pp. 224-225.

In accents which could only shock his "Puritan" readers accustomed to speaking of imputation, Nevin presented justification as interior renewal. The new creation follows the process and constitution of life; it is life in Christ, not by him. Those who share the life are saved "only by being brought within the sphere of his life, as a regular, historical, divine human process, in the church."[19] The new creation is a continuation in Christians of Christ's life which justifies; its growth is their sanctification. Justification and sanctification are inseparable, according to Nevin, although they remain distinguishable. One is justified and grows in holiness through openness to Christ in the church.

2. The Presence of Christ in the "Actual" Church

In stressing growth in the life of the new creation as a regular, historical, divine-human process in the church, Nevin was brought to distinguish between the ideal church or the church as a power of a new creation in Christ, and the actual church or the historical, fallible church which is visible. The latter is palpably not what it could be; but the ideal church, sown in Jesus Christ, is at work in it. The ideal church is within history, growing and seeking to become visibly what it already is in Christ--it is being actualized. The ideal church is not to be imagined as

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[19] Ibid., p. 228. See also Weekly Messenger (hereafter cited as WM), October 8, 1845: "I have no hope save on the ground of a living union with the nature of Christ as the resurrection and life. Both for my understanding and my heart, theology finds here all its interest and attraction. For no truth am I more willing to suffer contradictions and reproach if such be the will of God."

a platonic idea floating above the growth and struggle of history; it is closer to what Karl Rahner means when he speaks of Christ's role in the whole of history as its "prospective entelechy."

The distinction between the ideal and the actual church was first made in the sermon, "Catholic Unity," referred to in the last section. Nevin expanded somewhat upon it in the preface to The Mystical Presence in April, 1846, and then a few months later he developed the concepts further in a sermon entitled "The Church."[20] His text was Ephesians 1:23 on the church as Christ's body, "the fullness of him that filleth all in all." With his presentation of the actual church as evolving through the power of the ideal church, Nevin contended that the visible, actual church is the true church, although defective in holiness, catholicity, and unity during this time of its pilgrimage and growth. The sermon from this point of view contains polemical overtones directed at the dichotomy between "visible" and "invisible" church then prevalent in American Protestantism.

In the prevailing distinction between visible and invisible church, only the latter could be considered the true church, the sum of individual Chris-

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[20]Reprinted in Nichols, The Mercersburg Theology. "The Church" was preached at Carlisle in 1846 and issued as a pamphlet in 1847. In it Nevin fully develops the church as ideal and actual. Nevin's meaning of these terms is clarified in WM, October 6, 1847, where he translates Ludwig von Gerlach's terms "real" to mean what he means by "ideal"; and "palpable" to say what he means by "actual." The "ideal" church is sown in Jesus Christ and is within history, growing and seeking to actualize its real nature. See Note 55 on von Gerlach.

tians who through union with Christ have been saved. Religion is a personal matter as Joseph Berg, the Philadelphia pastor who engineered the heresy charge against the Mercersburgers in 1845, so typically said. In a fashion diametrically opposed to Nevin's statements about the constitution of the church, Berg wrote in 1846 that "the church does not make the believer [but] believers constitute the church." God deals with individuals and leads them to salvation and in this way the church exists, invisibly. But that made of the church an abstraction, whereas for Nevin it was far more. The true church is the actual church in process of visibly externalizing the attributes of the ideal church.

The church is no abstraction, not if the incarnation is the principle and source of a new supernatural order for man in history. The church is a consequence of the incarnation and, as such, bears the marks of its source of life--it must be "a true, living, divine-human constitution in the world."[21] Men in history are Christians singly because they have part in the life which is historically present, "already at hand organically in the church, the living and life-giving body of Jesus Christ."[22] The life is historically present and experienced in the form of the church which is visible, actual, and imperfect.

> The actual may indeed fall short immeasurably of the idea it represents; the visible church may be imperfect, corrupt, false to its own conception and calling; but still an actual, continuously

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[21] Mystical Presence, p. 4.

[22] Ibid.

> visible church there must always be in the world, if Christianity is to have either truth or reality in the form of a new creation. A purely invisible church has been well denominated a contradictio in adjecto; since the very idea of a church implies the manifestation of the religious life [italics mine] as something social and common.[23]

The way in which "idea" has been used so far is not as such opposed to what is actual. All life in this sense is ideal; that is, it exists in the form of possibility before it can become actual. It is in the power of this potential life, invisible and lying behind all outward manifestations, that the latter have any reality. It is in this sense that Nevin speaks of the ideal church.[24] It is a force, "the power of a new supernatural creation, which has been introduced into the actual history of the world by the incarnation of Jesus Christ."[25]

The ideal church includes visibility. That, according to Nevin, is a fixed law of life, for every spiritual force which life comprehends must take some outward form to be complete. The more intense the spiritual force, the more irresistible the operation of the law. The church, then, as comprehending in itself the refining, innermost life force of humanity (Christianity is only human nature made absolutely complete)[26] "cannot

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[23] Ibid.

[24] "The Church," in Nichols, op. cit., p. 58.

[25] Ibid.

[26] Ibid., p. 60.

possibly exist in the character of a simply inward and invisible constitution."[27] Visibility is as much a part of the church as the body of man, but "it is not the visibility of single Christians that is required but of the church as an organic body in whose presence alone all individual Christianity becomes real." (Italics mine.)[28]

The visible, historically situated church, that is to say, the actual church, is experienced as deficient in the qualities and attributes contained in the idea of the church. The actual church is the church in history as it reaches from the incarnation of Christ to the present time, the new creation in Christ, never yet complete but pressing on toward its completion. It is "reaching forward to still new developments in the future that will cease only when the ideal church and the actual church shall have become fully and forever one."[29] Therefore, in every stage of its historical development the actual church must be expected to fall short of the perfection destined for it in the end. Although the church is complete from the first in Christ its root, it requires a process of historical evolution, according to the law of life, to actualize itself with final, universal triumph in the world as a whole. In time, it bears the vicissitudes of time-related things. Thus, while the historical church is always the true church, it is never a pure or perfect one and "not, therefore, necessarily free from

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[27] Ibid.

[28] Ibid., p. 61.

[29] Ibid., pp. 61-62.

either heresy or schism."[30] As Nevin wrote in a rather summary statement on the aspects of the true church:

> The history of the actual church, then, is but the presence and life of the ideal church itself, struggling through a process of centuries to come to its last, full manifestation. . . . The actual is the body of the ideal in growth, the process, constantly changing and flowing by which it is externalized and so made complete, as the great world-fact of redemption. (Italics mine.)[31]

The church which is the proper object of our faith is the new creation revealed originally in Christ's person and now in the actual church, a real historical process reaching forward to the end of time. It is in this historical, visible, actual church that the new life in Christ is encountered. There Christ the ideal is actualized and his life experienced. About this relationship between Christ and the church, Nevin wrote:

> No relation, then, can be more intimate or necessary than that between Christ and his church. . . . There can be no church without Christ, but we may reverse the proposition also and say, no church, no Christ. The incarnation would be shorn of its meaning, if the fact were not carried out to its proper world development, in the church. (Italics mine.)[32]

Believing in and asserting a real historical revelation of his life in the church does not derogate from the glory of Christ as some of Nevin's opponents charged it did. Quite the contrary was the case, he believed, because, by stressing his continued life in the church, we show

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[30] Ibid., pp. 62-64.

[31] Ibid., pp. 64-65.

[32] Ibid., p. 66.

> . . . the fullness of our faith in his incarnation as a permanent fact for our salvation. The grace and truth comprehended in this fact are not left to evaporate with us into a thin abstraction. They are felt to be with us still, in the form of a real abiding constitution, with the same kind of actualness that belonged to the visible presence of the incarnate Word himself in the days of his flesh.[33]

As he developed his ideas on Christ's relationship to the church, Nevin saw more clearly that the church question is not a matter of opposition between a "religion of forms" in the church and a "religion of the spirit" in Christ as though Christ and the church were opposed to each other. The kind of anti-church feeling that would oppose the two does not see the church as historical in its true sense as the evolution of a "form of life, human life, which in the midst of continual progress, remains still, with unbroken continuity, always one and the same." In the latter view, the one he made his own, Christianity

> . . . is a new order of life, starting in Christ himself . . . that requires for its completion, like all life, a steady evolution of its contents [italics mine] . . . . This real historical constitution of the new creation in Christ Jesus, by which it is clothed with an objective and enduring character . . . is precisely what we are to understand by the Holy Catholic Church.[34]

The question of Christ runs headlong into the question of the church. The relation of the church to Christ's living person is "the great question of the age," as Nevin wrote in 1850 in reviewing the work of a contemporary and kindred spirit, Robert Isaac Wilberforce, on the incarna-

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[33] Ibid., p. 72.

[34] "True and False Protestantism," MR 1 (1849), 88-89.

tion.[35] Wilberforce, an Anglican who subsequently converted to Roman Catholicism in 1854, was a representative in England, as Nevin was in America, of a Christological, ecclesiological, and sacramental renewal in the nineteenth century. He had been an associate of John Henry Newman and the confessor of Cardinal Manning before the latter's conversion to Roman Catholicism. He and Nevin were in agreement substantially in doctrinal matters although, as we shall see subsequently, they disagreed on the question of the eucharist as sacrifice. There was no personal exchange between the two until 1853 when Nevin indicated in a letter to Philip Schaff that he had received two notes that year from Wilberforce. Both men had been influenced by German theology; Wilberforce, to a great extent, by Johann Adam Möhler and the "organic" concept of the church.

Nevin was less than enthusiastic about Wilberforce's book, and his "review" was really an occasion for writing an article on Christology laced with quotations from Wilberforce which he found in agreement with the ideas he was developing. Nevin's Christology contrasted radically with the scholastic Calvinism he was taught at Princeton. Over against its minimizing of the incarnation and its stress upon the atoning death as

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[35]Both were influenced by German theologians. Nevin, in the review, revealing his familiarity with them, writes in criticism of the enthusiastic support given Wilberforce's work in Anglican circles that one could name, among the Germans, many works "of far more thorough and complete execution." He had in mind undoubtedly Liebner, Thomasius, Müller, and Dorner.

substitutionary satisfaction by which the elect have been saved, Nevin emphasized the incarnation and its consequences as an historical process. For him it was a reworking of the history of the race in the person of Christ in which Christians share his life through union with the victorious Christ. Men are saved through the presence in the church of his personal power. Thus, he wrote in his article occasioned by Wilberforce's book:

> The mediation of Christ, we say, holds primarily and fundamentally in the constitution of his person. His incarnation is not to be regarded as a device in order to his mediation. . . . It is itself the mediatorial fact. . . . He is the mediator because God and man are thus in a real way joined together and made one in his person. . . . Forth from this sublime fact proceeds the presence of the Holy Ghost, the power of the new creation in the world, the mystery of the church . . . and the whole process of salvation.[36]

In contrast with the abstract theory of predestination taught by his onetime professor, Charles Hodge,[37] at Princeton, which did not allow or even need a continuing connection between Christ and the church, Nevin placed the process of redemption within time and the human condition.

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[36]"Wilberforce on the Incarnation," MR 2 (1850), 170-72.

[37]Hodge (1797-1878) was Nevin's chief theological opponent in America. Nevin had been his student at Princeton (1823-26) and substituted for him as instructor (1826-28) while Hodge was studying in Europe. Hodge's class lectures were the basis for his Systematic Theology (1872), the most generally used seminary text of the late 19th century in America. It blended 17th century Calvinist scholasticism and Scottish realism, stressing both the power of reason and the verbally inspired, inerrant bible as the basis of faith. By 1890 it is estimated that his theology was almost universally held among Presbyterians. See A. A. Hodge, The Life of Charles Hodge (New York, 1880) and H. T. Kerr, ed., Sons of the Prophets (Princeton, 1963).

Christ's flesh is the necessary medium of communication with the human race and there is no saving union possible with him apart from it. To deny that would be to deny the meaning of the mystery of the incarnation. Christ's incarnation is a present force, not a mediation in the past or something that we as individuals communicate with only by way of memory as many of Nevin's contemporaries understood it. The incarnation lives with perennial force in the presence of Christ's humanity, the power of his flesh, in the world. Therefore, it must be said that the church

> . . . as a real human presence, carrying in itself the power of a new life for the race in general . . . is no abstraction or object of thought merely but a reality, continuously at work, in an organic and historical way . . . Christ communicates himself to his people and lives in them not by isolated favor in each case, but collectively.[38]

There are single Christians because they are in the whole. The church comes from within the mystery, not from outside it as a speculation. To the extent that the church grows out of the incarnation, Nevin admitted the charge made against him, that he put the church between Christ and the Christian. The church "does indeed stand between Christ and the believer, but only as the body of a living man is between one of his limbs and the living soul."[39] In the church the one mediation of Christ is carried forward. Any doctrine of Christ which fails to include a doctrine of the

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[38]"Wilberforce on the Incarnation," p. 186.

[39]Ibid., p. 187.

church as an article of faith "must for this reason be counted incomplete and unsafe."[40]

Having established the correlation between Christ and the church, Nevin tended to relate all other church related questions to this Christological basis. So, for example, it was evident to him that the problem of church unity could never be settled by dealing with peripheral questions like polity. There is a prior question to be settled, for the church needs to be seen as "a living supernatural fact back of all such arrangements, having its ground and force in the incarnation" and as "an ever living revelation of grace . . . in virtue of which . . . all organs and functions belonging to it have also a superhuman and heavenly force."[41] As with polity, so with other questions. These too were to be seen as an outgrowth of the church's relation to Christ. Take the example of liturgy. In his treatment of this question, Nevin once again showed the centrality of Christ as a present reality within the church giving life to all its functions and organs.

Much of Nevin's thinking on the liturgy was reflected in Liturgy, or Order of Christian Worship (1857), a liturgical handbook, the fruit of a committee of which Nevin had been chairman until 1851 when he began resigning from active church work for his period of reflection on the

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[40]"Trench's Lectures," MR 2 (1850), 605.

[41]"The Anglican Crisis," MR 3 (1851), 377-78.

Catholic question. The new liturgy restored to the German Reformed Church its liturgical spirit of the Palatinate and incorporated into it other traditions of the early church. It embodied "the true conception of a liturgy," by which Nevin meant a sacramental spirit with its understanding of Christ present and active in his new creation. A subsequent chapter of this study deals in greater detail with the ecclesiological implications of the liturgy. For the present our concern is with the Christological axis of a liturgical life which has its focus in the sacrament of Christ's presence in the eucharist.

Nevin authored a work on the liturgy in 1867 in which he defended the centrality of Christ in the liturgy and the emphasis which this places upon the church. It was written at the request of the General Synod of 1866 held at Dayton, Ohio, which felt that the liturgy was being unfairly attacked within the church. The new liturgy revealed the centrality of Christ reaching to all parts of the system--its theology revolved around him. The liturgy admittedly puts stress upon the church, Nevin wrote, even to the point of being charged at times with subordinating the idea of Christ to the idea of the church. But it does this "only as the church is held to be the necessary consequence of Christ . . . and never as putting the church in Christ's place."[42]

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[42]"Theology of the New Liturgy," MR 14 (1867), 33.

The objection about de-emphasizing Christ Nevin discussed further in a response to Professor Isaak Dorner's article criticizing the theology of the new liturgy.[43]

> We do not believe in the church first and then in Christ; but because we believe in Christ, therefore we believe also in the church, just as believing in Christ first we believe in the forgiveness of sins and in the resurrection of the body.[44]

At the heart of the disagreement with Dorner was the varying emphasis each placed upon the incarnation, Dorner charging that Dr. Nevin put such emphasis on it that he downgraded the cardinal importance of the atonement and overrated the role of the church. It was the same objection his American critics had made. But, as Nevin explained, the incarnation carries within it the antecedent necessary conditions of the atonement. The atonement is only part of a movement which has its organic principle

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[43]Dorner, professor of the Berlin theological faculty, was one of the Germans to whom Nevin admitted a debt in Christology. He had been Philip Schaff's professor of dogmatics at Tübingen and it was probably through Schaff that Nevin had shared Dorner's insights. One of these is suggested by Nichols in Romanticism in American Theology as Dorner's analysis of the two Adams theme. P. 104 n. For a study of Dorner see Claude Welch, God and Incarnation in Mid-Nineteenth Century German Theology: Thomasius, Dorner, Biedermann (New York, 1965). Dorner had criticized Nevin in the liturgical controversy in the German Reformed Church in America accusing him of taking positions which seemed no longer evangelical. Dorner's article in Jahrbucher fur deutsche Theologie was cited by Nevin as an indication of the maturity of American theological thought that it was brought to the attention of so distinguished a German theologian. Nevin answered him in a series of articles in WM in 1868 which were then collected into one essay for MR 15 (1868).

[44]"Answer to Professor Dorner," MR 15 (1868), 585.

and source in the incarnation and which continues within the church. Any conception of the mystery of Christ which downgrades his active presence in the church must end in magnifying his death.[45] Nevin had stated his objection to such a restricted appreciation of Christ in reviewing Dorner's History of Protestantism in an earlier issue of the Mercersburg Review that same year of 1868.

> [The view] narrows the meaning of Christ's mediatorial person to His priestly office only; but his person from the beginning is no less the principle also of His prophetical and kingly offices. His coming in the flesh looks to His death, but not so as to pause in that by any means as its final object. (Italics mine.)[46]

The atonement is part of the process beginning in the mystery of the incarnation.[47]

Within Nevin's view of the incarnation, the kind of objection raised by Professor Dorner concerning over-emphasis on the role of the church seems fatuous. After all, in Nevin's analysis, "all really sound church feeling is at the same time true Christological feeling."[48] That is because it springs from an apprehension of what is comprehended in the incarnation regarded as the fountain head of Christian redemption. Magnifying the incarnation can only magnify the atonement. Such is the conclusion of the

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[45] Ibid., p. 601.

[46] Ibid., p. 602.

[47] Ibid., p. 610. See also The Mystical Presence, p. 223.

[48] Ibid., p. 613.

New Testament itself.[49] The atonement is swallowed up by the power of the resurrection, and "has no existence on the outside of His life, or as an event lying behind it in its present glorified form. It is part of His mediatorial being as this now stands." (Italics mine.)[50] It is perennial because of what Christ has become for men; it is the once for all sacrifice effective now because "Christ himself is once for all."[51] One can divide the two theories of Christianity just dealt with according to the sense given to "once-for-all." In one view the facts underlying Christian redemption belong to the past rather than the present. From this point of view the facts of the redemption are memories brought to bear upon us through thinking, and it would be superstitious to consider them as living still. In the other view, the position of Nevin, "the accomplished facts of redemption are felt to be at hand still in the abiding life of him through whom they have been accomplished, and the perennial mystery of the incarnation."[52] This second approach imparts a perennial character, a once and undying now to Christ's mediatorial role in the world, a perpetual living mediation through the church. The difference between these two

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[49] Ibid.

[50] "Once for All," MR 17 (1870), 107.

[51] Ibid. See also WM, July 19, 1848, where Nevin says he wrote The Mystical Presence in order to ground the atonement, as Calvin did, "in the perennial presence of Christ's life."

[52] Ibid., p. 117.

schemes, in Nevin's opinion, is the "real issue between what is called our Mercersburg theology . . . and the various foes."[53]

So far this chapter has developed the relationship between Christ and the church, showing that the new creation in Christ is present in the historical, visible church. In what follows the church is presented as an out-growth of the basic Christological confession of the apostles' creed which Dr. Nevin considered as an expression of the substance of Christianity.

Part B: The Church as an Integral Part of the Christology of the Apostles' Creed

1. The Apostles' Creed as an Organic Unit which Includes the Church.

The Mercersburgers were convinced that a sound theology of the church had to be based on a sound theology of Christ, and the latter, in turn, had to be founded upon the original creeds of Christianity. When, in 1849, the Mercersburg Review was launched as a spokesman for the movement, the journal's statement of policy indicated that it was upon the apostles' creed that it would be made to rest.[54]

In the American Protestantism with which John Nevin was familiar the scriptura sola norm had all but universally been accepted as the rule of faith. There was no need for tradition growing out of the life of the

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[53] Ibid., p. 111 n.

[54] MR 1 (1849), 7.

church. Nevin's own life mirrors this atmosphere. He tells us in My Own Life that he was unacquainted with the apostles' creed during his Presbyterian period. The creed was simply not used liturgically nor did it enter into the extra-liturgical instruction of either children or adults.

By the time Nevin began to attack this unassailed premise concerning tradition, he had written his series on the Heidelberg Catechism for the Weekly Messenger during the years 1840-42. This was an instructive experience in many areas of theology and may have influenced his thought concerning the apostles' creed. Certainly his acquaintance with Philip Schaff did. The latter arrived in America in 1844 fully aware of the thought of Ludwig von Gerlach concerning the organic indivisibility of the apostles' creed and of its authority as a basis for Christian unity.[55] Schaff acknowledged himself a disciple of von Gerlach with whom he had become acquainted while at Berlin.

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[55]When Schaff arrived in Berlin in 1842 von Gerlach was its President. He was a prominent member of the court theological circle of Frederick William IV under whom the United Church of Prussia was organized and in which von Gerlach was a principal. Schaff participated in the Saturday evening gatherings sponsored by von Gerlach. There he would have become familiar with the latter's concept of authority in doctrine, church, and society. Von Gerlach insisted that at the doctrinal level the three ancient creeds must be the basis for unity among churches and of orthodoxy within a church. Since creeds are an organic whole, no church could pick and choose from credal statements.

Schaff, in his book, The Principle of Protestantism, expressed themes concerning tradition which Nevin later developed. He showed that the American Protestant rejection of tradition was not a Reformation stance, and that the common understanding of it as a collection of beliefs was incorrect. Nevin and Schaff conceived tradition as the consciousness of the church concerning its faith. The fathers of the Reformation had this consciousness of faith, or traditional understanding, with which they read the bible. Therefore, for Schaff as well as for Nevin who translated and wrote the introduction to The Principle of Protestantism in 1845, the bible was read always in view of a consciousness preserved through generations. However, Nevin appears to have moved beyond the ideas expressed by Schaff by the time he wrote a controversial series of articles on the apostles' creed in 1849 for the Mercersburg Review. The creed did not spring from the bible, as Schaff had expressed it, but, as Nevin wrote, "from the living sense of Christ's presence itself." The creed in its most primitive statement antedated the new testament, was independent of it, and was, like the bible (and co-ordinate with it), an expression of the same revelation. The "living sense of Christ's presence" is the authoritative center in the church behind both the bible and the creed--both are authoritative because, by being expressions of his living presence in the church, they contain him.

The fundamental expression of tradition, which must govern all subsequent expressions of it, Nevin understood to be contained in the apostles' creed, that "free spontaneous externalization," as he said, of

the Christian consciousness. Both the Lutheran and the Reformed streams of the Reformation had accepted this primitive rule of faith. But the situation was different with the churches in America in the nineteenth century. The hostility with which many greeted Nevin's emphasis upon the creed was due to the conclusions he insisted one must draw from it regarding the incarnate Christ and the visible church as a consequence of the incarnation.

In objecting to Nevin's articles on the creed, the editor of the Puritan Recorder reflected the theological tenor of New England Congregationalism when he wrote that "the experience of two centuries has shown that the creed and Puritanism have not a kindred spirit." The apostles' creed was alluded to by the first Puritans, but its spirit never entered into the life of their churches, according to the Recorder. Approval by the Presbyterian and evangelical Lutheran press of that position against the Nevin articles reveals the reactionary climate in which the professor at Mercersburg wrote concerning the necessary inclusion of the "holy catholic church" within the formulation of the church's faith in Christ.

As Nevin saw it, the apostles' creed is the substance of Christianity in the form of faith, and it can only be understood from this primitive formulation. The creed is not a theological speculation upon the faith, but faith in its primitive form. It is not intended to be a theory about religion, but an affirmation

> . . . on the part of the church, of what Christianity was to her living consciousness. . . . This is the form of the creed. It has its very being in the element and sphere of faith . . . a direct spontaneous witness . . . to the great central realities of faith as they are immediately felt in the heart.[56]

Thus the creed owes its origin to the faith of the church and is in this way an expression of the Christian consciousness of its reality, its corporate faith.[57]

The creed is, then, the "spontaneous poem" of the life of the church, "the direct image and transcript in word of what Christianity was as a living substance . . . for the faith and by the faith of the early Christian world."[58] It came as a result of growth from within, the "evolution of hidden contents from a single root or ground" growing out of the great fact of Christianity itself. As a spontaneous expression of faith consciousness, the creed is the product of reflection only in the sense of being the result of contemplating the meaning of Christ. Seen in this way,

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[56]"The Apostles' Creed," Part II, MR 1 (1849), 214.

[57]In "Zacharius Ursinus," MR 3 (1851), 490-512, Nevin reflects in another context, but in connection with this subject, that "No creed or confession can be of genuine force, that has not the inwardly organic connection with the life it represents. This must go before the symbol, creating it for its own use. The creed so produced, may come to its utterance, indeed, in the first place, through the medium of a single mind; but the single mind, in such case, must ever be the organ and bearer of the general line in whose name it speaks; otherwise it will not be heard nor felt. . . . It must be the life of the Church itself embodied through some proper organ . . . and responded to by the Church at large as its own word."

[58]"The Apostles' Creed," Part II, p. 217.

Christ and Christianity are not simply doctrine or theory, but an expression of faith emerging from the consciousness of the Church that God has entered the world in the incarnation and is carrying out man's redemption in an objective, historical way reaching through all time. Christian salvation, objective and real, "necessarily determined its own form, and this then determined necessarily also the form of its believing apprehension in the mind of the church."[59] The consciousness of the church must be in harmony with the object of its faith and with the form and direction which faith in the incarnate Christ implies; "otherwise it would be no faith at all, but fancy only or opinion."[60]

The primary utterance of the Christian faith is contained in the confession of Peter, and this accordingly must be taken as the "foundation article" of the creed and "the rock" on which the church rests. In its apprehension of Christ as a living reality, Peter's affirmation embraced "the entire meaning and power of Christ" as expanded in the full creed. The process at work by which faith expressed in the confession of Peter runs its full course into the other articles of faith is a capital point with Nevin. What is embraced by belief in the incarnate Christ "runs forward, of itself, into the mystery of the church."[61] The apostles'

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[59]"The Origin and Structure of the Apostles' Creed," MR 16 (1869), 153.

[60]Ibid.

[61]Ibid., p. 332.

creed, in this view, represents the primary substance of Christianity as it has passed over from Christ to his people. This life coming from Christ constitutes the church which is itself, therefore, a divine fact in the world and an article of faith.[62] The structure of the creed itself is "abundantly conclusive" in its affirmation of the church in its historical form "as the supernatural carrying forward of the work of redemption . . . . [and] the organ of the new creation."[63]

Since, as we have just seen, the apostles' creed is an expansion of a basic Christological faith, its structure is not a matter of indifference. It is ruled by the movement of its object, the historical manifestation of Christ and the consequences of his incarnation in himself and in the church. "The form of the symbol thus is just as necessary as its matter. Christianity fundamentally is this array of facts, and this order of facts, and no other." (Italics mine.)[64] The onward flow of this confession cannot be broken off at any point so that a portion of it is accepted without the rest. "All its parts are organically bound together. They represent the movement of one and the same fact. We must believe all or nothing." (Italics mine.)[65]

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[62] Ibid., p. 339.

[63] "Cyprian," MR 3 (1852), 446.

[64] "The Origin and Structure of the Apostles' Creed," MR 16 (1869), 154.

[65] Ibid.

From what has just been written it may be understood that the unity of the creed is organic with respect to both matter and form. That is, the articles grow forth from a single life principle whose force reaches into all the articles, each article being an object of faith only because of its relation to the root out of which it grows. And the root itself is object of faith only through its relation to what proceeds from it as its necessary derivation. Thus there is unity of matter. But this oneness of matter involves necessarily oneness of form also. That is, the articles are so derivative from a common principle that they lead sequentially from one to another. They are so derived from the root that their relation to it serves to fix and determine their relation also one to another. The "all or nothing" principle which directs our faith in the apostles' creed is applied to its order or form as well so that its articles "can be apprehended truly only in the order in which they are made to challenge faith, and in no other order."[66] Christ, through the Holy Spirit, lives in the "holy catholic church" making it a "communion of saints." The various articles, as radiations of one faith, are themselves objects of faith. Through his conflicts with opponents of this position as well as through his historical studies, Nevin forged his conviction of the apostles' creed as a definitive expression of primitive faith. It is with that conviction that the following section deals.

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[66]"The Unity of the Apostles' Creed," MR 16 (1869), 313.

2. The Apostles' Creed as a Witness to Primitive Faith

The opponents of the Mercersburg Theology were lumped together by Nevin in a collection known as "Puritanism" which may be described, from his point of view, as the "unchurchly" sect-prone evangelicalism dominating the nineteenth century American church scene. And for settling existing theological and ecclesiastical difficulties, among which he numbered the ills of "Puritanism," John Nevin judged that an indispensible necessity is "a true and hearty inward submission to the authority of the Creed, according to its original intention and design."[67] All sound doctrine and true church life, he believed, had to proceed from a common faith as expressed there. Any other process is necessarily rationalistic, an effort to build faith on intellection, whereas the true order is just the reverse.

The apostles' creed was ignored by the "Puritanism" of New England as unorthodox in its unbiblical doctrine and irrelevant to nineteenth century Christianity. A good expression of his reaction to that spirit is found in Nevin's reply to the series of articles in the Puritan Recorder objecting to his articles on the creed. Nevin believed that the Recorder pieces revealed a certain preconception about the nature of the church as a purely human institution which he found contradicted by the concept of the church found in the creed. The faith of the latter is the same faith which the gospels expressed. Both are rooted in Christ. The

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[67]"The Apostles' Creed," MR 1 (1849), 344.

mystery of the church grows forth from the mystery of the incarnation itself so that the idea of the church has its root in the idea of Christ. "All this lies in the new testament as well as in the faith of the primitive christian world expressed in the apostles' creed."[68] To reject the creed is to reject not only the faith of the primitive Christian community, but that of the early Protestant confessions as well. Both Reformed and Lutheran confessions had a common ground in that expression of faith. "Protestantism was held to be, not a new faith extracted from the bible, but the old Christian faith itself, purged from Roman corruptions; and the ancient symbols were taken . . . as its necessary ground and rule."[69] However, "Puritanism," as Nevin saw it, was by its own confession something materially different from all previous Christianity, both Catholic and Protestant. Such "upstart faith" takes no account of history. The sect spirit which hovers over it is, as he says, "universally unhistorical and so, to the same extent, creedless."[70]

The spirit of "Puritanism" was found in many quarters. Striking out at criticism by the low Dutch Church through its paper, The Christian Intelligencer, and by the brand of Lutheranism represented in the Lutheran Observer of Baltimore, Nevin accused them of having no faith whatever in

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[68]"Puritanism and the Creed," MR 1 (1849), 592.

[69]Ibid.

[70]Ibid., p. 606.

the mystery of the "holy catholic church." "When they pretend to accept it, they mean in fact something else altogether; something which is no mystery at all, and no object of faith but only of notion and fancy."[71] Their understanding of the church requires no real presence of the supernatural under an outward form, and it finds "no contradiction to itself in the sect system, carried out to any extent."[72] Such an impoverished concept of the church stems from a failure to relate the faith of the creed to the faith of the scripture.

"Puritanism" did not conceive of the church as derivative from the faith of the bible and as having a supernatural character. "Theoretically and practically, Puritanism treats the actual church as a simply human institution, the work of man's hands."[73]

Nevin's studies on Cyprian published in 1852 only confirmed in his mind the reality of the breach between "Puritanism" and early Christianity. Nevin sympathized with the Cyprianic view of the early church without wholly revealing his hand. "Our object," he wrote concerning his series on Cyprian, "has been to describe simply rather than to explain or defend."[75] The church views of Cyprian with which Nevin sympathized

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[71]"The Dutch Crusade," MR 6 (1854), 89.

[72]Ibid.

[73]"Early Christianity," MR 3 (1851), 538.

[74]"Thoughts on the Church," MR 10 (1858), 388.

[75]"Cyprian" IV, MR 4 (1852), 560.

were considered by "Puritanism" as a figment. Such an understanding was considered as unbiblical and unsafe because for them the historical church was not of the essence of the Christian mystery in any way but "only an outward accident attached to it."[76]

The Cyprianic studies, in fact, convinced John Nevin that Protestantism as a whole, not merely "Puritanism" of an evangelical sort but Anglican Episcopalianism as well, rested upon an unhistorical doctrine of the church. Each of these, widely spaced on the Protestant spectrum, was broadly at variance with the teaching of Cyprian. Nevin's research had convinced him that the ancient view found in Cyprian was not his invention but reflected a tradition concerning which both East and West were substantially in agreement. With respect to the church, he found that on all sides "the conception of its supernatural real constitution as an object of faith, in the sense of the apostles' creed," was accepted.[77] There was harmony between the faith expressed by the fathers from the first to the fifth centuries and that of the early creeds on the meaning of the church. In that harmonious concept the church was understood "as a necessary constituent in the great fact of Christianity" and "as the real organ and medium of all its power for the salvation of men--an outward historical constitution . . . to which men must submit by faith."[78]

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[76]"Cyprian," III, MR 4 (1852), 422.

[77]Ibid.

[78]Ibid., p. 445.

These studies raised questions in his mind about Protestantism. Has there ever been in the world, he asked, "such a divine constitution as the holy catholic church, in the sense of the ancient creeds? Were the first ages right, or were they wrong in making the existence of it an article of faith, and in grounding upon it the entire weight of the world's salvation?"[79] This was the question of questions for all who could "rise above paltry prejudices of party and sect." Was there ever a church in the sense of the creed and "is the mystery of a divine church in this old sense still at work in the world?"[80] Here the early church stood on its true foundation: "The creed, as held from the beginning, forms the true and only legitimate basis of Christian orthodoxy."[81] What Dr. Nevin wrote long after the studies on Cyprian in his reflections upon the Presbyterian Union Convention in 1868 may suitably express in a summary way his thoughts on the church and the creed which contains "the first principles of Christianity." He wrote:

> All confessionalism, all denominational symbolism, to be of a truly catholic, and not merely sectarian character, must refer itself ultimately to the apostles' creed as the primary basis of the universal Christian faith. . . . Deny the necessity of starting with the creed, the necessity of being rooted and grounded in the first principles of Christianity, as we have them set forth in this archetypal symbol, and all religious thinking is at sea. . . . Without this they cease to be

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[79] Ibid., p. 451.

[80] Ibid., p. 452.

[81] "Wilberforce on the Incarnation," MR 2 (1850), 172.

> historical and lose all harmonious relation to the proper unity and wholeness of the church. All true catholicity, unquestionably, must begin with the cordial, ex animo acknowledgment of the apostles' creed.[82]

3. The Apostles' Creed: The Implication of an Historical Church

The objection raised against Nevin's theology, that it gave priority to the church over Christ, he answered from the point of view of the creed. His theology does lay stress on the doctrine of the church "as stress is laid on it also in the apostles' creed, but only as the church is held to be the necessary consequence of Christ (following the creed in this also)."[83] Rigid adherence to the theology implied in the form and matter of the creed and the prominence given to faith in the church on the part of Nevin was a cause for his disagreement with Isaak Dorner to which we have alluded previously.[84] Dorner criticized the theology of the new liturgy of the German Reformed Church in America, charging that its church orientation would have a damaging effect upon the "Protestant principle." As Nevin conceived the case, one's theology must go the way the creed carries it. Therefore the new liturgy's theological basis was indeed ruled by the creed. It was a theology which moved in the bosom of "the original regula fidei of the Christian world."[85] All orthodox

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[82]"Presbyterian Union Convention," MR 15 (1868), 102-03.

[83]"Theology of the New Liturgy," MR 14 (1867), 33.

[84]See footnote 43 in this chapter.

[85]"Theology of the New Liturgy," MR 14 (1867), 33.

theological thinking must start where this fundamental form of the faith starts and "keep step with it at every point as far as it goes" because the creed is "the necessary form of the gospel, as this is first apprehended by faith."[86]

The movement of the creed to include the church and all that is implied in that concept makes the faith historical. The gospel faith "has entered permanently into the stream of the world's life . . . as the continued working of the power it carried with it in the beginning."[87] The conception of a supernatural economy having an historical form is what is meant by the "holy catholic church" of the creed. It is there in its place in the creed "as part of the faith" setting forth the form and manner in which the work of salvation is carried forward. We cannot get along without the church "in our conception of the real, objective, historical working of Christ's mediatorial life in the world."[88]

It was on this question of the church as historical that Nevin separated himself from the German theologians upon whose Christological studies he had drawn so heavily. They seemed too often "to stop short of what is involved for faith in the full historical apprehension of the Christian mystery, as a continuous presence in the world."[89] Their

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[86] Ibid., p. 34.

[87] Ibid., p. 40.

[88] Ibid., p. 42.

[89] "Our Relations with Germany," MR 14 (1867), 632.

work needed to be supplemented with the more practical way of Christianity found in the creed where the Christological intent runs head-on into the church. It is an "essential part" of the Christian mystery "to the acknowledgment of which we are shut up by the inward movement of the creed."[90]

Nevin considered Isaak Dorner as an example of the forementioned failure of German theology. Dorner, he believed, did not follow through on all that was implied in the inward movement of the creed. His History of Protestant Theology which Nevin reviewed in the Mercersburg Review in 1868, the same year that their controversy arose, revealed his refusal to embrace the total implication of the creed. The article on the "holy catholic church" draws after it the idea of sacramental grace which Dorner admitted, but in addition, in Nevin's view, it includes "the idea also of an apostolical ministry by divine consecration" which Dorner did not admit.[91] The church demands both for its historical existence as the realization of Christ's life in the world. The failure he found in Dorner was a reflection of the inability of German theology as a whole to follow through upon principle. That is why he broke with it--"because we find it untrue to its own Christological principle."[92]

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[90] Ibid.

[91] "Dorner's History of Protestant Theology," MR 15 (1868), 289.

[92] Ibid.

Directed by his diminished vision of the inner movement of the creed, Dorner accused Nevin of taking positions regarding the church which were no longer evangelical. He charged that the material principle of the Reformation, justification by faith in the atoning sacrifice of Christ, was weakened by the heightened position given to the church. But that is true, responded Nevin, only if one has a limited understanding of the scope of the principle.

> Must the material principle of the Reformation be so taken, that it shall be Christological only to the extent of embracing the atonement in Christ; or may it not be taken as Christological in full, be being brought to embrace at once the whole Christ and all His benefits? In the latter case it will run the same course with the apostles' creed, and bring us finally to its doctrine of the holy catholic church.[93]

The doctrine of atonement and the article of justification by faith can be given life through a renewed interest in the meaning of Christ's coming in the flesh. "First the incarnation; then the atonement."[94]

In Dorner's view, since the end toward which Christianity was directed was Protestantism, the beginning must be construed in conformity with the end and not the other way around. As Nevin read him, Dorner made Protestantism and its principle of justification by faith the "new creation" of Christianity which ought to judge the beginning of the process. Nevin admitted that the end does indeed actuate and rule the beginning, but it is only the absolute end, Christ's life mediated in the

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[93]"Answer to Professor Dorner," MR 15 (1868), 572.

[94]"Dorner's History of Protestant Theology," MR 14 (1867), 364.

church, that does this. The full gospel embraces far more than Protestantism and its principle. In his words,

> For the very reason that the end must give us the sense of the beginning, I insist on seeing in the beginning more than the special mind simply of the sixteenth century which cannot, by any means, be taken for the consummation of all Christian truth. Christianity is a deeper and wider fact than Protestantism; and in the relation of one to the other, the only true order unquestionably is that by which Protestantism is taken to its root in Christianity, and not Christianity its root in Protestantism. The Protestant principle of justification by faith then is valid, only as it falls back on the general principle of Christianity, which is none other than Christ himself; and this in such a way that Christ is not brought in as the instrument simply of our justification, but is apprehended as being at once in himself the whole fullness of our salvation.[95]

As far as Nevin was concerned, Dorner had narrowed too much the significance of Christ in not subordinating sufficiently the Protestant principle to the general principle of Christianity, Christ, and all that follows upon this for mediation of his life. There was no room for the church as one of the mysteries of "our catholic undoubted Christian faith," as the Heidelberg Catechism spoke of the creed's content. Without an adequate place for the church Dorner is "by his own confession not in full harmony with the creed."[96] To be in harmony with it, the church must meet us as a mystery "growing out of the general mystery of godliness," the incarnation. And to be in harmony with the creed, the church must be recognized as demanded by the movement of the mystery

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[95]"Answer to Professor Dorner," MR 15 (1868), 640.

[96]Ibid., p. 645.

proclaimed by that primitive expression of faith, and as part of the evolving law of life and salvation which it expresses.[97] Therefore, the "holy catholic church" is not a random article of the creed, but it is there through the immanent law of the symbol itself whose articles are, objectively considered, the movement of the new creation in Christ. "Through this self-unfolding movement they are not only what they are, but also where they are, in the apostolical regula fidei."[98]

It has been shown that ecclesiology cannot be separated from Christology and that the way in which they are interrelated is reflected in the apostles' creed, the expression of the community's consciousness of its faith. The life that is rooted in Christ comes from him in the Spirit through the visible church as an extension of the mystery of incarnation. The objective presence of Christ's life in the church is offered to believers in sacraments. The church and sacraments consequently are interrelated. The understanding one has of the latter reflect his understanding of the former as bearer of Christ's life. In the following chapter the church as embodiment of Christ's life and the sacraments as concentrated signs of the presence of that life will be discussed and their correlation indicated.

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[97] Ibid., pp. 579-80.

[98] Ibid., p. 586.

CHAPTER III

THE ORGANIC LIFE OF THE CHURCH EXPRESSED IN THE SACRAMENTS

The church is a living organism bearing within itself supernatural powers which it manifests in an historical, visible way. It is the source of life for its members who by union with the church are thereby rooted in Christ as parts in the whole. This chapter, which analyzes John Nevin's writings on this point, is divided into two parts. First it develops the idea that Christ is the root of an organic life process by which the visible church mediates his life to believers through organs and functions necessary for its growth. Secondly, it shows that through sacramental actions Christ's life is objectively present and made effective in those who do not frustrate it by unbelief.

Part A: The Organic Life of the Church

1. The Church as Bearer of Christ's Life.

In a final chapter appended to the second edition (1844) of The Anxious Bench, Nevin's thin volume written to counteract the influence of Charles Finney's kind of revivalism among the churches in Pennsylvania, he contrasted two religious systems. The one he called "the system of the catechism" which was part of a full and normal church life with stress

given to the staples of preaching, continued religious instruction, and a sacramental life. The other he called "the system of the bench," an allusion to the pew or bench from which those converted in the revival would make their profession of faith. This system employed whatever temporary and often emotional measures, "new measures" they were called, were useful for achieving the climactic conversion.

The system of the "bench" Nevin saw as characteristically pelagian, involving, in the end, "the gross and radical error" that conversion is somehow the product of the sinner's will and "not truly and strictly a new creation in Christ Jesus by the power of God."[1] It is a system which generates action, but action which tends to be spasmodic and which leans toward fanaticism. By contrast, the system of the "catechism" is a church system. It is a theory of religion which "carries us continually beyond the individual, to the view of a far deeper and more general form of existence in which his particular life is represented to stand."[2] With respect to both the ruin and the restoration of man, this system moves beyond the individual to the whole of humanity. Contrary to the theory of Nathaniel Taylor which the Finneyite "new measures" revivalists followed, depravity in man was understood as not simply the offspring of a particular will revealing itself in actual transgressions, but as "a

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[1] The Anxious Bench, 2nd ed., revised and enlarged, (Chambersburg, Pa., 1844), p. 123.

[2] Ibid., p. 124.

wrong habit of humanity itself, a general and universal force which includes and rules the entire existence of the individual man, from the very start."[3]

Parallel with the depth of man's ruin just described, Christian salvation, according to the system of the "catechism," was conceived of as restoration for the individual as a part through the church as the whole, renewed humanity in Christ. Humanity fallen in Adam has been made to undergo a resurrection is Christ and, so restored, "flows over organically" to all who are in Christ. This union with humanity restored in Christ "is reached and maintained through the medium of the church."[4] The point is that in a theory of religion which respects the church, the latter is seen as more than an aggregate of individuals; it is rather "an organic life, springing perpetually from the same ground" and "the mother of all her children."[5] To make his point clear Nevin closely parallels Christ and Adam, the church and the human race, the individual as member of the church and as member of the human race. In each case life is traced from the source through the group to the individual.[6]

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[3] Ibid.

[4] Ibid., p. 125.

[5] Ibid., p. 129. Nevin uses John Calvin's title for the Church. In the version of "Catholic Unity" appended to Philip Schaff's, The Principle of Protestantism, Nevin alludes to the title in a footnote, p. 201, amplifying how all must be one before they can be many because they share the one life of the Church.

[6] Ibid., p. 130.

The concept from The Anxious Bench of a common life in Christ shared with individuals through the church was developed further in the sermon entitled "Catholic Unity" referred to in the last chapter. In keeping with the occasion at which it was delivered, a joint convention of the Reformed Dutch and the German Reformed churches, Nevin developed an ecumenical theme. The two churches had been on close terms in America where the struggling Germans had been supported by the Dutch during the pre-Revolution period. As noted previously their doctrinal similarity and geographical proximity argued for further unification in common missionary projects at first and then hopefully in ecclesiastical union. Using a text from Ephesians 4:4-6, "There is one body and one Spirit, even as you are called in one hope of your calling," Nevin traced the source of church unity to Christ who is its "root" and seed of life.

As the principle or root of the church, Christ's life reaches over into the Christian, gradually transforming his life and making it one life with Christ.[7] The mystical union which results is "not simply moral, the harmony of purpose, thought and feeling, but substantial and real, involving oneness of nature."[8] Sharing the same life, Christians are joined together as one spiritual whole, Christ's body and "the fullness of him that filleth all in all," a Pauline expression favored by Nevin for

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[7]"Catholic Unity" in Nichols, The Mercersburg Theology, p. 38.

[8]Ibid.

describing the church. A strictly organic union rooted in Christ binds the church so that no part has life unless it shares in the whole. Christ is seen as the whole. He is the man "comprising in his person the new creation, or humanity recovered and redeemed as a whole."[9] If one is to remain Christian he cannot be separated from the newly created humanity in Christ which is the church. As the preacher of "Catholic Unity" put it:

> We are not Christians each one by himself and for himself, but we become such through the church. Christ lives in his people by the life which fills his body.[10]

The church does not rest upon its members, either upon their similarities of interest or their covenants or any other human device, but the members rest entirely upon the church for life.[11] In and through his body men share in the vitality of the resurrected humanity of Christ "in an organic and historical way."[12]

2. The Church, Christ's Life Historically Present, as an Object of Faith

In "The Church," a sermon preached in October, 1846 and published in 1847 in pamphlet form, Dr. Nevin developed more fully than elsewhere the image of the church as a living organism in the process of growth. Two

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[9] Ibid., p. 40.

[10] Ibid., pp. 40-41.

[11] Ibid., p. 40.

[12] "Wilberforce on the Incarnation," MR 2 (1850), 186.

years had intervened since Schaff's arrival in America and their intellectual exchanges undoubtedly broadened Nevin's view of the church as an organism in the process of historical development, ideas already familiar to him prior to the advent of the young German. But Schaff made Nevin's contact with German theology, upon which the American had fed, personal and vital. In addition to his personal friendship with Isaac Dorner and his association with August Neander whom he considered his master, Schaff had the advantage of matriculating at Tübingen with its excellent faculty including, in addition to Dorner, Ferdinand Christian Baur, its most influential theologian at the time.

At Tübingen Schaff indirectly felt the influence of Johann Adam Möhler[13] although the latter had left the university in 1835, two years before young Philip arrived. Möhler, who like Nevin considered the church as a vital organism, apparently had had a widespread influence upon both the Protestant and Catholic faculties during the preceding decade. Möhler had reacted against rationalism and had restated the faith in terms of romanticism and idealism. He acknowledged a debt to August Neander and to Neander's master, Schleiermacher, although he manifested a growing severity toward the latter as his thought evolved. He recognized the corporate aspect of Christianity, and the church he saw

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[13]For a contemporary study of Möhler see Hervé Savon, Johann Adam Möhler: the Father of Modern Theology (New York/Glen Rock, 1966).

as a dynamic living tradition, an organism--the collective consciousness of a social organism capable of change. This organic approach to Christianity is expressed in his first book, Unity in the Church, in 1825 and again in his great work, Symbolik, in 1832. Reaction to Symbolik was still a reality at Tübingen during Schaff's time. Whether he was influenced by Möhler is difficult to say. What is certain is that the newly arrived professor at Mercersburg brought from Germany an understanding of the church as a social organism. It may be presumed that he shared this view and the currents at Tübingen with the preacher of "The Church."

The sermon, preached at the opening of the Synod of the German Reformed Church, was meant to promote a feeling for the church "in opposition to that spirit of religious self-reliance" which prevailed in America and to which the previous section adverted.[14] He told his audience that the widespread indifference to religious individualism which they observed could be avoided only if the church were considered as a life bearing reality, an object of faith as much as the incarnation itself.[15] It cannot be looked upon, as he wrote in an article the year before, as an arbitrary and convenient union, something to be "wholly originated at any time de novo" with the consent of individuals.[16] This was the kind of least

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[14]"The Church," a sermon preached at the opening of the Synod of the German Reformed Church at Carlisle, Penna., October 15, 1846 and published by the request of the Synod (Chambersburg, Pa., 1847), p. 3.

[15]Ibid., p. 4.

[16]"Pseudo-Protestantism," WM, September 10, 1845.

common denominator union referred to in the published version of "The Church" in a footnote concerning the "Evangelical Alliance" of 1846. The "Alliance" was an interdenominational society of individuals rather than denominations whose purpose was to extend among the churches the sense of sinfulness involved in division. Schaff reflected Nevin's opinion in 1846 in his book, What Is Church History?, which Nevin translated for English readers. In it the author opposed the idea of the alliance on the ground that its basis was not truly ecumenical. To this Nevin would add that its silence regarding the apostles' creed revealed its a-church bias. Both men saw it as a Protestant alliance against Rome and the Anglo-Catholic movement, whereas they believed, as we shall see in a subsequent chapter, that Rome could contribute to Protestantism and to the eventual state of Christianity.

In quite the reverse of the spirit upon which the "Alliance" was based, the major thrust of the sermon on "The Church" was an emphasis on the need for objectivity in religion. The sense of the objective power resident in the church was, in Nevin's opinion, what grounded all solid piety. As an objective source of divine life for humanity, the church is the historical continuation of the life of Christ in the world, a process continuing to the world's end.[17] Without faith in the church as the historical presence of Christ's salvation we cannot have a proper faith in him. The preacher of "The Church" stated it this way:

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[17]"The Church," p. 16.

> If there be no such supernatural constitution in the world as the idea of the church implies, the whole fact of the incarnation is turned into an unreal theophany and the gospel is subverted to its foundation.[18]

Nevin affirms in this sermon as elsewhere that the church is the historic continuation of the incarnation actualizing Christ's redemptive grace for individual Christians through its resources. It is a constitution in the world "including in itself the resources which are needed for its own ends" and always struggling to actualize in full the life that is in it.[19] As such, no matter how far short the church falls from representing the life it bears, it is still "the actual body of Christ, and the only form under which his life appears in the world, or can be said to be in it at all."[20]

The consequences for this study of the fact that the Church is an objective, life-bearing body are far reaching. We shall see that it is fairly axiomatic with Nevin that the body gives rise to whatever is needed to minister to its continued life, and that these organs and functions both grow out of and minister to the vitality of the church. All organs and functions which carry forward the life of the church are, as he says, "divine organs and divine functions."[21] To cite an example (one which will be dealt with in more detail in the next section as well as in chapter

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[18] Ibid., p. 17.

[19] Ibid., p. 18.

[20] Ibid., p. 23.

[21] Ibid., p. 24.

five), there is an objective virtue or force given to the ministerial office in ordination which carries over into its functions which are "divine." The sacraments which the ordained pastor ministers have "living power in themselves."[22] Without supernatural powers of this sort in its constitution the church would cease to be the historic continuation of the incarnation. The incarnation would then be reduced "to a gnostic abstraction, a thing of mere memory." One need only recall from the preceding chapter the rigid connection between ecclesiology and Christology which Nevin based on the creed to appreciate his final word on this subject in "The Church." "Without faith in the 'holy catholic church' there can be no full abiding faith in the Word made flesh."[23]

The Word made flesh "reveals himself and works till the end of time" through the church "as a medium and organ."[24] The church itself is therefore an object of faith because it is the bearer of supernatural powers, part of the Christian mystery, and an essential part of Christian salvation.[25] Nothing is more necessary for restoring proper understanding

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[22] Ibid., p. 25.

[23] Ibid.

[24] An undated manuscript addressed to Henry Harbaugh, who revived the Reformed Church Review (Mercersburg Review) after the Civil War had caused its suspension. Located in the Library of the Historical Society of the Evangelical and Reformed Church at Franklin and Marshall College, Lancaster, Penna.

[25] "Our Relations with Germany," MR 14 (1867), 632.

of the supernatural than "a resuscitation of faith in the church."[26] To turn the church into anything less than an object of faith "as all unchurchly and rationalistic religionists do" is to abandon the ancient faith of the church.[27]

The previous chapter stressed how for the believer there are not many acts of faith, but one with many aspects interconnected. The visible church is a necessary part of the one mystery of faith, the needed connecting link between the mission of the Spirit and the experience of believers. If the church is not considered in this way, "it cannot be said to be apprehended and believed in its own proper sense at all."[28] Its own proper sense is as mystery-connected and therefore faith-related. Otherwise the church becomes a doctrinal abstraction rather than an objective reality of the new creation.[29]

In demanding that the mystery of faith include the visible church as a life bearing reality, Nevin reached what he considered "the fundamental

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[26]"Natural and Supernatural," MR 11 (1859), 208-210.

[27]"Once for All," MR 17 (1870), 115-116 n. But concerning the form of the Church in any given period of history, he writes: "The faith itself looks not directly and first of all to any given or actually existing form of the Church historically considered, but to the general necessity of it rather as flowing from the gift of the Holy Ghost." (Italics mine.) Ibid.

[28]"Thoughts on the Church," Part II, MR 10 (1858), 389-90.

[29]Ibid., p. 420.

difference between the 'churchly' and the 'unchurchly' schemes of Christianity, the catholic order of faith and the puritanic, the theology of the creed and all theology besides."[30] In the so called churchly scheme there is a reciprocity of relation between Christ and his body which is totally foreign to the "modern mechanical conception."[31] The church in the theology of the creed "is no accident of Christianity," something merely tacked to it outwardly for convenience and form as it is made to be in the "mechanical" way of conceiving it. It is a necessary element for revealing Christianity in the world.[32]

In Charles Hodge Nevin found an almost perfect expression of the "unchurchly scheme." For the Princeton professor Christianity is the result of a purely mechanical decree on the part of God terminating in the salvation of its subjects. Salvation is considered under the most abstract view without the intervention of any really objective and concrete constitution of grace. "Of course, then it can be only for the 'elect'[33] in the narrow Calvinistic sense of election.[34] Nevin found

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[30]Ibid.

[31]"The Dutch Crusade," MR 6 (1854), 89.

[32]Ibid.

[33]"Hodge on Ephesians," MR 9 (1857), 224.

[34]What Hodge means may be expressed in this quotation describing a speculative construct of predestination: "Membership in the invisible church is not vital union with Christ, or regeneration by the Holy Ghost. . . . [The invisible church] consists of the whole number of the elect, that have been, are, or shall be gathered into one, under Christ the head

Hodge's understanding "by no means the same as that contained in the creed."[35] Rather the church is made to be "nothing more at last than the fact of [the decrees'] execution in the case of the elect."[36] In his usual "Puritanic" style Hodge understood the presence and power of the Spirit as in no way bound to the church, regarded as "a fixed objective constitution" by which men are joined to Christ and become and grow as Christians. The church is only a name "used to denote collectively those who are considered to be already Christians under a different aspect altogether."[37] Such a concept was at the opposite pole from credal belief. For this reason, "Puritanism" as represented by Hodge and others could not describe the church as anything more than an aggregate of those who were already saved by another means. It could never accept it, as Nevin did, as an object of faith. He saw the church as the historic constitution of saving power at work in the world, a position he was able to buttress by appeals to the past. The following section deals with his historical studies.

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thereof. It includes, therefore, probably millions of the unborn and millions of the unconverted. . . . It is not their vital union with Christ, nor their actual regeneration by the Holy Ghost, that is presumed, but their election." Charles Hodge cited in J. H. Nichols, Romanticism in American Theology, p. 258.

[35]"Hodge on Ephesians," MR 9 (1857), 226-228.

[36]Ibid., p. 228.

[37]Ibid., p. 241.

3. Historical Confirmation

John Nevin's study of church history strengthened his prior conviction about the church as a visible, historical source of life and object of faith. The ancient church revealed itself as a medium of grace which was "lodged in its very constitution" and as such "was regarded as an object of faith."[38] Such a conception of the church had gone out of date in mid-nineteenth century America. And yet in Nevin's opinion the issue was so critical that all other points of controversy in theology and polity derived their significance in the end from one's concept of the church. Could American Protestantism, he questioned, play ostrich with respect to the ancient tradition of the church? In his opinion it had to face the question squarely "whether in this issue the ancient faith, or the modern variation . . . is to be taken as the true sense of Christianity."[39]

In two articles entitled "Early Christianity" in 1851, Dr. Nevin showed that the Christianity of the second century was clearly not that of "Puritanism," and least of all as this was expressed in New England. Contrary to that view, the church in the second century "was considered a mystery, an object of faith, a supernatural fact in the world, not based at all on the will of men."[40] It rested on a ministry with authority

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[38]"Wilberforce on the Incarnation," MR 2 (1850), 195.

[39]Ibid.

[40]MR 3 (1851), 538.

whose origin rested not with the people but with God. The sources left no doubt that the spirit of Ignatius of Antioch was "fully opposite to Puritanism, on the great question of the Church."[41] Corresponding with the real union of divinity and humanity in Christ, the church, as it was understood in Ignatius' time, had to be an historically and visibly real source of divine life in the world. The early church laid stress on unity with the hierarchy as the visible bond of the sacramentum unitatis and it centered that unity in the See of Rome.[42] From the end of the first century, Nevin concluded, the church was "catholic" and not Protestant as his contemporaries understood Protestantism. The Ignatian church, in a word, contained in germ the whole theory of the historical, visible, life-bearing system that was fully presented afterward in the writings of Cyprian and Augustine whose ideas were equally uncongenial to the prevalent American Protestant ecclesiology.

Nevin's four articles in 1852 on Cyprian confirmed his findings in "Early Christianity" of the year before concerning the nature of the church of the early centuries and its variance with the church of his day. In the Cyprianic period reaction to the Novatian heresy helped clarify the doctrine of the one life of Christ present in the church; it was this understanding of unity in the church's life on which the Novatian schism "was dashed to pieces." The controversy lay between the authority the

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[41] Ibid.

[42] Ibid., pp. 541-42.

church as a "supernatural constitution regarded as a real historical fact in the world" over against "a simply human movement which affected to treat it as no fact."[43] In Cyprian's theology, the incarnation brings into the world a higher order of life, a constitution of supernatural character to be apprehended only with faith.[44] The gospel is not just a doctrine or theory of salvation; it is a revelation of grace and truth "in living form, an actual economy of redemption."[45] To be out of unity with this economy is to be out of Christ. Therefore, the "unity of the church comes then from its constitution" and in no way depends "on the thought and will of men."[46]

Both the second and the third centuries revealed the church to Nevin as "a supernatural fact in the world under an outward historical form . . . destined to endure to the end of time."[47] It is the medium for all time by which salvation is made actual, the organism through which grace works in the world. The value of all other streams of life, whether bible, sacraments, or ministry comes from their presence within this mystery.[48] Salvation is within the body and "no faith could

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[43]"Cyprian," second article, MR 4 (1852), 348.

[44]Ibid., p. 357.

[45]Ibid., p. 358.

[46]Ibid.

[47]Ibid., part three, p. 428.

[48]Ibid. But Nevin is careful to say that he is not presenting this "as necessarily right and true. We propose only to show, that it was universally held in the second century." Ibid.

be honest and sound which was not ready to submit to the mystery which here challenged its submission."[49] The piety of the fourth and fifth centuries as well, the religion of such men as Athanasius, Chrysostom, Basil, the Gregories, Jerome, Ambrose, and Augustine'"is conditioned from beginning to end by the conception of the church, as the necessary organ and medium of grace."[50] The church, in these early centuries, was unquestionably considered a mystery which men were bound to take as they found it by faith, the "whole sense of which is lost the moment they pretend to deal with it as an object of mere natural sense and reason."[51]

The great question then remains, "Was this conception of Christianity true or false? To say that Cyprian laid undue stress on outward institutions and forms, is at bottom simply to call in question the soundness of his whole theory of religion which was at the same time . . . the universal theory the early church."[52] For his part Nevin was non-commital, but there is an overwhelming sympathy in his writing for the patristic church. A letter to Orestes Brownson written in the midst of his Cyprian series reveals this sympathy.[53] He had intended to be

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[49] Ibid., p. 420.

[50] Ibid., p. 443.

[51] Ibid., part four, p. 544.

[52] Ibid.

[53] August 18, 1852, Brownson Archives, Notre Dame University. Available on microfilm at the Library of the Lancaster Theological Seminary, Lancaster, Penna.

merely historical, he wrote, betraying no bias. But he admitted that for all his intended objectivity his previous article--he referred to the second one on Cyprian--breathed throughout "a strong sympathy with its subject over against the reigning Protestant theory of the church at the present time."[54] His object was "merely to hold up facts, to bring home if possible to others the actual difficulty in the case."[55] But he was himself "an anxious inquirer" writing, as he admitted, "under no inconsiderable pressure . . . of spirit."[56]

There is no evidence that Nevin ever fully accepted or rejected the view of the church which he discovered as a result of his patristic studies. There is no doubt, however, that he was profoundly influenced and that he found there confirmation of his opinion that in tapping the wellsprings of early Christianity he had reached the source of Protestantism and her lost vision of the church.

So far this chapter has considered the church as the bearer of Christ's life to all of humanity redeemed by him. The humanity of Christ is the root of the organic life mediated to individuals through the church's visible organs and functions which were considered as necessary for its historical existence as an organism. As bearer of the life of Christ to men the visible church is a necessary part of the mystery of salvation, the

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[54] Ibid.

[55] Ibid.

[56] Ibid.

link between the Holy Spirit and believers, and an object of faith. In what follows we shall study Nevin's concept of the sacraments as the media through which the life of Christ's glorified humanity is made present to believers through the Spirit.

Part B: The Sacraments as Signs and Seals of the Life of the Church

1. The Presence of Christ's Life in the Church Through Sacraments

A basic axiom in John Nevin's ecclesiology is that faith in the sacraments is relative to faith in the church. The understanding one has of the mystery embodied in the church always conditions his view of the sacraments and vice versa.[57] The quality of faith in sacraments is, for this reason, a simple but sure touchstone of faith in the church itself. The idea of "divine" sacraments actualizing the supernatural realities they represent and the idea of a "divine" church as proclaimed in the creed, go hand in hand.[58] Such an understanding of the sacraments stresses the church as the "actual presence of an ever living revelation of grace" in virtue of which "all organs and functions which belong to it have also a superhuman and heavenly force."[59] Sacraments, in this view, owe their vitality and vigor to the whole system within which they are comprehended.

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[57] "The Anglican Crisis," MR 3 (1851), 379.

[58] "The Sect System," MR 1 (1849), 502.

[59] "Anglican Crisis," MR 3 (1851), 377-78.

The sacramental theology of the men of Mercersburg encountered in America a broad based, though not total, defection from Reformation doctrine on the sacraments. As Nevin noted in The Mystical Presence sacraments were generally regarded as rites only whose grace value is entirely dependent upon the subjective exercise of the worshipper. This doctrinal failure on the part of American Protestantism is reflected in a growing indifference toward infant baptism and a parallel growth in Baptist conversions, many of whom were snatched from the Reformed churches in the fervor of revivals. By the 1840's the Baptists had become, with Methodism, one of the two largest denominations in America. Both were unsacramental in principle. But much of the Reformed tradition was indistinguishable from them in this respect. Nevin expressed his sadness at the decline of sacramental faith he observed among Lutherans of the East. The President of their seminary at Gettysburg rejected Lutheran sacramental teaching and considered Calvinism as too "high church." The consistent opponent of Nevin in Baltimore, Editor Kurtz of the Lutheran Observer, was, as expected, in the opposite camp as a supporter of Zwinglian memorialism.[60]

The German Reformed Church was no exception to the general debilitation of sacramental appreciation. The charges of heresy against the Mercersburgers, to be dealt with subsequently, were a manifestation of the doctrinal split in the church. Launched by their opponents in the Philadelphia Classis headed by Dr. Joseph Berg, the accusation, which

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[60]"Wilberforce on the Incarnation," MR 2 (1850), 187.

centered on the question of sacraments, grew out of polemically charged references in The Principle of Protestantism and its appended "Catholic Unity" regarding certain of Berg's utterances about the ordinances. For the moment it suffices to mention that Nevin's understanding is at the opposite end of the sacramental spectrum from Berg's. The sacraments are the sign and seal of whatever power is comprised within the church, and how we think of the one invariably determines how we think of the other. In fact, the church itself may be understood as a sacrament, a mysterion.[61] It is as such a grace bearing historical presence, "the ascension gift of the risen Son of God" whose functions, organs, and powers are of supernatural origin and force.[62] In and through it Christ works by his Spirit to the end of time; such a church with merely natural functions and powers is a contradiction in terms.[63]

The departure from sacramental tradition which Nevin's critical eye scanned within both the Reformed and Lutheran churches was an abandonment of the cause of the Reformation as Luther understood it, as

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[61]"Answer to Professor Dorner," MR 15 (1868), 626. Nevin reviews the broad sense which can be given the term sacrament and concludes: "Now in this broad view, there is just as much room as ever for ascribing to Christianity a general sacramental character; and to do so at any special point [the point at issue is ordination] does not necessarily imply by any means that a new sacrament is there affirmed of one and the same order with the sacrament of Baptism and the Lord's Supper. The Church itself is a sacrament, a mysterion, not to be apprehended, for this reason, except through an act of faith."

[62]Ibid., p. 582.

[63]Ibid., p. 628.

recovery and rehabilitation. It reshaped the whole theology of the reformer, for a church without supernatural powers, without grace in its sacraments is foreign to the mind of Luther.[64] In fact, both streams of old Protestantism, the Reformed and Lutheran, intended to maintain the substance of the ancient sacramental doctrine. "Both held the sacraments to be mysteries, regarded them as organs of grace, looked through them by faith to the presence of Christ's life as objectively and truly comprehended in their solemn transaction."[65] But as he wrote in the course of reviewing the work of one of his German tutors, Ernst Sartorius, on the person and work of Christ, Reformation faith was sadly wanting so that the question of the sacraments and "along with them the whole subject of the church" was of little interest and meaning for many.[66] This failing was related by Dr. Nevin, as was his custom, to the spirit of antichrist, to the reluctance, that is, to accept the implications of the incarnation. It is a failure to see Christian salvation as "a fact primarily made real under a concrete form for the benefit of the whole world" with an "enduring objective character in the church."[67]

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[64]"Sartorius on the Person and Work of Christ," MR 1 (1849), 165-66.

[65]Ibid., p. 166.

[66]Ibid., p. 167.

[67]Ibid., p. 168.

Since the church was "the organic outflow from the fountain head of all grace and truth in the world, the union of the divine and human in the person of the Lord," its organs and functions had to be of a corresponding character.[68] Outgrowths of the life which is in the fountainhead are themselves sources of life. That is, celebrations of life in Christ are sources of life because they are organs growing out of the root source, Christ, and out of the Church, "the body of him that filleth all in all." In the following chapter we shall develop more fully this concept of the sacrament as a life bearing organ by dealing with the principle sign, the eucharist. But presently some consideration is given to the ministry as an example of an organ which shares in the general sacramental character of the church. Ministers functioning in their diaconal role "hold a divine power from him [Christ] by apostolic succession."[69]

Applying the principle that the church's organs and functions must have a "divine" power if its life is to be actualized historically, Nevin conceived of ordination as conveying supernatural virtue or force.[70] The ordination service of the Revised Liturgy published in 1857 speaks of a transmission of divine power to the minister, making the ministry of "divine origin" and of a "truly supernatural character and force." Writing

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[68]"Theology of the New Liturgy," MR 14 (1868), 54.

[69]Undated manuscript addressed to Henry Harbaugh in Library of the Historical Society of the Evangelical and Reformed Church at Franklin and Marshall College, Lancaster, Penna.

[70]"The Church," as in Nichols, The Mercersburg Theology, pp. 72-73.

in defense of the revised liturgical ceremonies, Nevin spoke of ordination as an investiture with the power of an office, a sacramental seal of a heavenly commission. It is a symbolic assurance that the Spirit will be with them "in the faithful discharge of their official duties."[71] There was no intention in Nevin's explanation of the theology of the Liturgy of making ordination a sacrament in the same order of importance with baptism or the Lord's supper.[72] The only question was whether it was a real investiture from Christ with the powers of a true heavenly office. Are the organs and functions of the church in varying degrees sacramental manifestations of her life powers? His answer was that "as the church is, so must be also its Ministry"; it must have a more than human quality.[73] Even ministerial absolution was "sacramental," God's grace present in an act of the church. He taught his students that absolution was more than a declaration of God's intent to pardon the sinner; it was "the medium through which God communicates the grace of pardon."

While relating specifically to the ministry, the following enlightening excerpt written in 1849 is a clear expression of the general theme that the objectively present life in the church gives rise to grace bearing organs and functions.

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[71]"Theology of the New Liturgy," MR 15 (1868), 54.

[72]"Answer to Professor Dorner," MR 15 (1868), 626.

[73]Ibid., pp. 627-28.

> The Protestant ministry's validity does not depend upon any outward succession, but upon sharing in the life of the church which gives powers to the organs needed for this life's gift to men. If then we must admit some disturbance in the ordinary law of ministerial succession at the Reformation, it does not follow at once that the succession itself for this reason fell to the ground; the true succession lay in the life of the church as a whole [italics mine]; and if it can be shown that this [the life] gave birth to the Reformation, it must be allowed to have been sufficient at the same time to make good . . . any unavoidable defect that was found to attend . . . the outward geneology of the Protestant ministry. After all, it is the church, the presence of Christ's life in his body which supports the true line of the ministry, [italics mine] and not the line of the ministry that upholds mechanically the being and authority of the church.[74]

2. The Objective Power of the Sacraments

Participating in the life of Christ is an essential constituent of the sacramental mystery. The sacrifice of Christ has perennial force through the presence of his life now. The fruition of the sacrifice is through a real communication in the life through the organs and functions of the church. "Such was the sense undoubtedly of the old sacramental doctrine" which sought to combine here "the objective and subjective sides of the Christian salvation.[75] The fruit of Christ's works is not

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[74]"The Classis of Mercersburg," MR 1 (1849), 385-86. The question of succession became a bugbear for Nevin. Perhaps his studies in Cyprian had swayed him toward accepting the need for legitimate succession. At any rate, he offered a strong case for that need in 1854 in the sermon, "The Christian Ministry," in MR 9 (1855), 68-93. He insisted that institutional succession and administrative unity were both necessary for validity. Apparently he had resolved the question of succession within the German Reformed Church to his satisfaction by that time. The ordination service in the new liturgy three years later would express both legitimate succession and the transmission of divine power as part of the ministry.

[75]"Doctrine of the Reformed Church on the Lord's Supper," MR 2 (1850), 541-42.

simply that they live in man's memory. The works have a perpetual and actual force. His one offering needs no repetition; it is "once for all, because the once reaches through all time. This it can be, however, only as the life in which it has been rendered continues to live and make itself felt."[76]

This is the way the church thought from the beginning, seeing in the central mysteries of her faith "the presence of the living Christ always, as the necessary guaranty and medium of all true communion with the benefits procured by his death."[77] Christ's mediation is not something past and gone, beyond the order of this world, but it lives with perennial force "in the actual presence of Christ's manhood in the world."[78] His once for all sacrifice is an ever enduring fact "in the power of his indissoluble mediatorial life."[79] It is a "once and undying now."[80] The grace of God, in this way, is a supernatural presence objectively at hand once for all, through the continuous mediation of Christ in the church; and then "room is made for seeing how the outward side of the sacrament . . . may indeed enshrine the inward side."[81] Grace is really present,

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[76] Ibid., p. 547.

[77] Ibid.

[78] "Wilberforce on the Incarnation," MR 2 (1850), 185.

[79] Ibid.

[80] "Once for All," MR 17 (1870), 110.

[81] Ibid., p. 119.

because the mediation of Christ is really at work in the church. Where, however, the powers of redemption are regarded simply as "facts thought of in a far off past, or in a far off heaven, the sacraments representing them can never be in relation to them more than mere outward signs, as they are taken to be in all unchurchly Christianity."[82]

Nevin's vocal opponent within the German Reformed Church, Joseph Berg, represents, as already noted, an entirely different understanding of the sacraments. The professors at Mercersburg had disturbed Berg by their "Romanizing." Both Schaff's The Principle of Protestantism and Nevin's "Catholic Unity," the sermon he reprinted as an appendix to Schaff's book, had referred unfavorably to theological and historical opinions of Dr. Berg. He replied in an article in which he accused the Mercersburgers of teaching heresy. Successive efforts by him and a relatively small band of sympathizers within the German Reformed Church failed to incriminate Nevin and Schaff. Frustrated in his efforts, Berg seceded from the church and in a farewell address to his congregation in Philadelphia he raised the issues he had found unacceptable. The sermon was criticized by Nevin in the Mercersburg Review in 1852.[84]

Berg's understanding of sacramental ordinances reflected a subjectivity typical of much of evangelical Protestantism familiar to Nevin.

[82] Ibid.

[83] "Answer to Professor Dorner," MR 15 (1868), 593.

[84] "Dr. Berg's Last Words," MR 4 (1852), 283-304.

Sacramental ordinances for Berg have devotional value but cannot of themselves convey divine power or life. Only the Holy Spirit can do that. And since this may happen in many ways, there is nothing unique about the ordinances. Thus, religion was seen as a personal matter in which God deals with individuals separately. To ascribe too much power to the sacraments in an objective way, as Berg charged Nevin did, is to minimize both the efficacy of Christ and the personal, subjective nature of the religious life.

In responding to Berg's charges that he gave too much importance to the sacraments' power to the detriment of Christ's blood which alone has the "inherent power to confer grace," Nevin replied that the power intrinsic to the sacraments is not different from the grace of Christ who is its fountain and source. The action of this grace is at work in the sacraments "exhibited to the faith of men under a divinely instituted form."[85] It is Christ working instrumentally in the world of grace. For this reason the sacraments have "intrinsic power"--"they are seals of what they represent in this kingdom."[86] The real issue at stake here involves the whole question of sacramental grace and the church. To deny the mystical force of the sacraments, as Berg did, "is to deny at the same time the supernatural character of the church" and to subvert

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[85] Ibid., p. 291.

[86] Ibid.

the mystery of the incarnation. Nevin was peeved with Berg and hurled a fiery anathema at all who like him would deny the supernatural character of the sacraments and the church.[87]

The testimony of the church in all ages was against those who denied the objective, mystical force of the sacraments. Nevin's study in the Fathers had yielded a view of the church as the organ and medium of grace with supernatural power to achieve its purpose. His Cyprianic studies had revealed that sacraments in the early church were believed to be "not signs and pictures only, but seals and vehicles of the grace they represent."[88] Nevin was deeply impressed by the force of the evidence he had found in the Cyprianic period, and his sympathies break through in his reflection upon it:

> How it may be with others we know not, but on our own mind, we confess such a testimony on such a subject coming from such a man fall with uncommonly powerful and solemn impression. In what startling contrast it stands with the reigning so-called evangelical tone and style of the present day. Which is to be regarded as right and which wrong, the voice of the ancient church in Cyprian or this unsacramental modern voice? We pretend not here to answer the question. It is one however of most profound significance and interest which the thoughtful may well be asked to lay seriously to heart.[89]

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[87] Ibid., pp. 292-93. One who denies the supernatural character of the sacraments and church is "condemned by both Luther and Calvin; condemned by the Heidelberg Catechism and the Belgic Confession; condemned by the universal faith of the church from the fifth century again back to the second . . . condemned, we will add, by the plain letter of the New Testament, as it has been understood by the church through the ages."

[88] "Cyprian," MR 4 (1852), 376.

[89] Ibid., p. 377.

The evidence from a study of baptism in Chrysostom supported his findings in the articles, "Early Christianity" and "Cyprian." Baptism caused an "actual regeneration," by the grace of God, "to the power of a new and heavenly life." For Chrysostom it was no sign simply of a spiritual fact, "supposed to have place at some other time or in some other way."[90] It was neither the token of an inward change already past, nor the pledge of an inward change to come. Nor was it an act of mere profession like the covenanting among Congregationalists. The force of the sacrament was not only subjective, but, as Nevin said

> It was at the same time most really and truly objective also, carrying with it the power of God's grace and making what it signified to be actually at hand for its subjects, and available for their use thenceforward as it had not been before.[91]

The sacramental understanding of Chrysostom was, moreover, "the universal orthodox Christian thinking of the age." In fact, back to the first Christian times. Baptism was the very sacrament of regeneration, "the power of God really and truly unto salvation" making what it signified to be actually at hand.[92]

When one understands that the church involves the conjunction of the supernatural and the natural in one and the same economy of grace "its sacraments cannot possibly be regarded as outward signs only of

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[90]"The Old Doctrine of Baptism," MR 12 (1860), 196.

[91]Ibid.

[92]Ibid., pp. 208-09.

what they represent."[93] They are, rather, seals of the actual realities themselves, mysteries in which the visible and the invisible are bound together.[94] The opposite is true when one works within an unchurchly system. Baptismal regeneration is then made into boldly figurative language and the practice of infant baptism declines. That was the case in Nevin's lifetime; both the estimation and practice of infants receiving the sacrament was in radical decline in all denominations. The tendency indicated how powerful the unchurchly sect spirit had grown. By the time Nevin's The Mystical Presence appeared in 1846, the Baptists had spawned into the largest religious communion in the country as he noted without satisfaction in his book. They totally opposed infant baptism, and their spirit extended far beyond them so that "all true sense of the sacramental value of baptism is wanting in large portions of the church, where the ordinance is still retained."[95] No objective reality was recognized in the life of the church which the sacrament could present and make real for the life of the believer.[96]

When Horace Bushnell's Discourses on Christian Nurture appeared in 1847, Nevin reviewed it favorably with respect to the author's thesis that the child's growth should occur in such circumstances that he would

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[93]"Theology of the New Liturgy," MR 16 (1868), 43.

[94]Ibid.

[95]The Mystical Presence, p. 150.

[96]Ibid.

never have to experience a conversion in order to date his introduction into Christianity.[97] That "Puritan" system which "assumes that children must grow up in a state of alienation from God, to be converted afterwards in an extraordinary way" was, Nevin wrote, "clearly" an innovation upon the general order of Christianity.[98] But Nevin disagreed with the theology of Bushnell's Discourse since it included no concept of the church as an organic source of life. The difference between author and reviewer was evident in their opinion regarding infant baptism. For Bushnell, children were related to God in a special way because of their parents' faith, not because of baptism. Through their parents' faith they were communicants in the life of the church. Baptism simply demonstrated the privileged position of the child. Even with adults, baptism did not create membership but was a public manifestation of an already existing membership. This solely representational quality of baptism found acceptance also in the covenant theology which Charles Hodge taught at Princeton, but with a different stress. In his theology baptism was the badge of a covenantal union with God which exists already by reason of birth from covenanted parents. Nevin found both of these, and any other extra-sacramental plan which looked upon union with God as a normal modus vivendi, to be totally defective. Baptism did not

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[97] WM, June 23, 30; July 7, 14, 1847.

[98] Ibid., July 14, 1847.

merely represent what already was a fact by another means. Rather it is by baptism that one first comes regularly and fully within the range of the life power which constitutes communion with God.[99]

Regarding the objectivity of the sacraments, the seal or assurance which they give is that the grace is offered, not that it is actualized in the recipient. One who is baptized is offered salvation, but is not assuredly saved. Nevin once compared this offer to the outward call of Christ to the twelve disciples which did not itself convert them, but offered them full title to salvation and which in fact was actualized in all but one of them.[100] It remains always at hand as a fact "for their use and appropriation through the whole of their lives." Such was the nature of baptismal grace according to Nevin.[101] It is an objective offer which can be frustrated only by unbelief. But the saving life which is an objective reality in the church is tendered to the believer in the sacraments. "The true issue in the end is "church or no-church, sacrament or merely moral sign."[102] This was the question also at stake, as Nevin saw it, in the discussion which followed upon the case of George Gorham.[103]

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[99]"Baptismal Grace," WM, August 11, 1847.

[100]Ibid.

[101]"Sartorius on the Person and Work of Christ," MR 1 (1849), 163.

[102]"Noel on Baptism," MR 12 (1850), 258.

[103]"The Anglican Crisis," MR 3 (1851), 359-98.

Gorham, an Anglican vicar, was refused installation by his bishop on the ground that his teaching on baptism was heretical. When his appeal to the ecclesiastical court was dismissed, he re-appealed to the Privy Council whose lay judges ruled his doctrine orthodox in 1850. It was unfortunate enough that purely civil authority had settled a theological question of "primary consequence," but far more important in Nevin's mind than this was the theological question of sacramental grace as an objective reality which he found to be at stake. Such an understanding was extensively and sweepingly rejected, it seemed to him, in the discussion which the case occasioned in the religious press on both sides of the Atlantic Ocean. The larger question in Nevin's discussion of the case was whether sacramental grace was to be recognized any longer in any form in Protestantism. The controversy involved "the whole idea of baptismal grace, and along with this the whole conception of sacramental grace in any form, as an objective mystical and supernatural virtue going along with the holy sacraments, in distinction from all states and acts accompanying the use of them in the minds of men."[104] Even Anglicanism, he felt, had been touched by the spirit of "Puritanism." He observed in it an anxious care to divest itself of Catholic and Reformation sacramental heritage, to clear itself "of all such obsolete mystification as we find on the subject even in Luther, Calvin, and the English Prayer Book." The Gorham case in

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[104] Ibid., p. 371.

England and its outcome had brought him to express how disturbed he was by the unsacramental drift in America. "How can Lutherans and the Reformed, Methodists, Presbyterians, or even Congregationalists of the old stamp," he asked, "not be struck with some feeling of anxiety and dread at the thought of making Protestantism by its own voice and vote constitutionally baptistic and unsacramental, in any such open revolutionary style?"[105]

With the Gorham case the issue of the reality of sacramental grace and its ultimate bearing upon the meaning of the church and on the meaning of Protestantism itself was starkly brought to peak for Nevin. The issue bore in upon his personal problem with Protestantism and his sympathy with Rome. The issue was in the end "the true sense of Protestantism, and its right to exist, over against the pretensions of the Church of Rome."[106]

It has been shown that the life which is in the church gives rise to sacramental organs which are necessary for the perennial and historical effectiveness of Christ's unique sacrifice. They are signs and seals of the life that is objectively present in the church and which is offered to and made effective in all who do not frustrate it through unbelief.

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[105] Ibid., pp. 372-73.

[106] Ibid., p. 392.

The relationship between the church and sacraments which was drawn by Nevin is best illustrated in the sacrament of the eucharist, the treatment of which is the concern of the next chapter.

CHAPTER IV

THE EUCHARIST AND THE CHURCH

In the preface to his controversial study of the eucharist, The Mystical Presence, John Nevin wrote that our view of the Lord's supper "must ever condition and rule in the end our view of Christ's person and the conception we form of the church."[1] Based upon this principle of the interrelation between eucharistic theology and ecclesiology, this chapter shows how Nevin's understanding of the eucharist contributed to his description of the church and how his concept of the eucharistic liturgy complemented that description.

1. The Church as an Historical Source of Christ's Life

When Nevin accepted the call to Mercersburg in 1840, he entered a church which had largely abandoned the Calvinistic teaching on sacraments and had returned to the Zwinglian position. As the latter was popularly understood, the sacraments were symbols, in the sense of commemorations of the death of the Lord, effecting a moral union.[2] But

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[1] The Mystical Presence, p. 3.

[2] J. H. A. Ehrard, upon whose two volume work, Das Dogma vom heiligen, Abendmahl und seine Geschicte, Nevin had drawn in his studies on the eucharist, reported in Vol. 2 his opinion that Zwingli could probably be absolved from the tag of memorialism. Nevin was open to the idea, but

no communion of believers with the life of the glorified humanity resulted, in the way explained by Calvin and adopted by Nevin. He appears to have been leaning toward a pure Calvinistic position on the eucharist while at Pittsburgh, and his rather low opinion of Zwinglianism expressed in the Weekly Messenger soon after his arrival at Mercersburg distressed some readers. His thinking on the eucharist was undoubtedly stimulated further by his study of the Heidelberg Catechism which he began soon after his settling at Mercersburg. The result was a series of articles on the Catechism in the Weekly Messenger and a series of sermons in the college chapel. In that confession of faith from the church of the Palatinate he would have found support for his understanding of the eucharist.

Early in the 1840's he had drawn the general outline of his eucharistic thought as it would appear in 1846 in The Mystical Presence. In the spirit of Calvin he wrote in 1842:

> In the Lord's supper an actual union is realized on the part of the believer with the life of the Savior's glorified body involving a communion with him in his whole nature, as real as the bond which identifies us in virtue of our natural birth with the general nature, soul and body, of our first father Adam.[3]

Expressions like that about the reality of eucharistic presence and union evoked protesting storms within Presbyterian, Dutch and German Reformed, and even Lutheran churches, many of which had abandoned

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reserved, in "Doctrine of the Reformed Church on the Lord's Supper," MR 2 (1850), 462-63.

[3]Weekly Messenger (hereafter cited as WM), April 27, 1842.

the reality of presence for a Zwinglian position.[4] In the German Reformed Church, Dr. Joseph Berg, the vocal opponent of the theology developing at Mercersburg, rose to defend his understanding of orthodoxy and to declare as heresy the concept of "spiritual real presence," by which communion with the glorified Lord is possible.[5] The heresy charges which had been drawn up against Nevin by the Berg-dominated Philadelphia Classis for presentation to the 1845 Synod at York had concerned, for the most part, his eucharistic teaching. Meanwhile in the pages of the Weekly Messenger Nevin continued to present and defend his teaching after the dismissal of the heresy charges by the Synod of York. A summary of his case for Calvinist teaching on the Lord's supper was issued in June, 1846, as The Mystical Presence: A Vindication of the Reformed or Calvinistic Doctrine of the Holy Eucharist.

The church problem centers in the eucharist, he says, because it is the heart of christian worship. The sacrament of the supper is "the central representation" of the "significance and power" of the christian's communion with the Savior.[6] Nevin implies that, since communion with

[4]John Thomas Tredway, Eucharistic Theology in American Protestantism, 1820-1860 (Northwestern University, Ph.D. dissertation, 1964) traces the development of American Lutheran Zwinglianism, pp. 8-53.

[5]Nevin had referred to real presence in the sermon, "Catholic Unity." This 1844 sermon, braced by footnotes from Calvin supporting his eucharistic views, was published as an appendix in the English translation of Schaff's The Principle of Protestantism in June, 1845.

[6]The Mystical Presence, p. 54.

the Savior is the church, what christians believe is happening to them in the eucharist and being expressed in this central act of worship describes what their belief is concerning the church. "The entire question of the church," said Nevin, "centers ultimately in the sacramental question as its inmost heart and core."[7] He felt that Protestantism in America had in large part fallen away from the sacramental doctrine which was its tradition from the sixteenth century. Such departure with respect to the eucharist involved a departure from the meaning of the church as this was conceived of in the period of the Reformation. The doctrine of the eucharist was interwoven with the system and understanding of the church at the time. To give it up, the author of The Mystical Presence thought, "must involve in the end a renunciation in principle, if not in profession, of this system itself in its radical, distinctive constitution."[8]

The source of life for the church and the sacraments is the mystery of the incarnation. Neither church nor sacraments as a result can be abstractions. The principle of the incarnation is at work in both. The church is a living, divine-human constitution in the world, an organic life source for individual christians. As such it must be historical, i.e., real and visible, the "actual" church as medium of union with Christ for believers.[9] The very idea of the church implies the visibility of its

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[7] Ibid., p. 3.

[8] Ibid., p. 4.

[9] Ibid., pp. 4-5.

religious life. Its forms of worship may be looked upon as embracing the life which is in the church and expressing it. In this way the mystery of the incarnation as the principle of its life is also the true measure of all sound christianity. "To be real, the human as such, and of course the divine also in human form, must ever externalize its inward life."[10] The forms of worship therefore speak of the church because they grow out of and externalize her life.

The ability of worship forms to express the church is particularly true of the eucharist. It is therefore "in some sense central" to christianity, for the latter is grounded in the "living union of the believer with the person of Christ" and this fact "is emphatically concentrated in the mystery of the Lord's supper."[11] The form of worship which is the eucharist, Nevin is saying, since it concentrates in itself the communal life relationship between Christ and believer, is uniquely able to speak about the meaning of church.

In contrast with this position, the Reformed Church of the nineteenth century had, according to Nevin, abandoned its tradition and adopted an "unchurchly," rationalistic tendency with respect to sacraments. The consequences for ecclesiology have already been alluded to: the reality, visibility, the externalization of the church's life are affected. The purpose of The Mystical Presence was to bring into view the theory of the Lord's supper as it stood in the confessions of the Reformed Church in the sixteenth

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[10] Ibid., p. 5.

[11] Ibid., p. 51.

century and to show, by way of contrast, the true status of the nineteenth century church.

Taking exception to the accepted opinion, Nevin wrote that Calvin and not Zwingli was father of the Reformed sacramental tradition. The Calvinistic tradition, he believed, grew out of the life of the church itself in its antagonism with both Lutheran dogma and a rationalistic understanding of sacraments, but Calvin was the "theological organ" by which it eventually came to the clear formulation in which it continued to be expressed in later symbols. In Calvin's understanding, as Nevin read him, the sacramental doctrine is inseparably connected with the idea of an internal union between believers and Christ by which they are joined to him and subsist with him by the power of a common life. Salvation is a process by which the believer is inserted into the person of Christ mystically. Corresponding with this conception, "nothing less than such a real participation of his living person is involved always in the right use of the Lord's supper."[12] Effort was made to avoid any rationalistic understanding of the Eucharist which would make it less real and whole. Nevin summarizes Calvin against this tendency in this way:

> In opposition to all such representations, it was constantly affirmed that Christ's people are inserted by faith into his very life and that the Lord's supper, forming as it does an epitome of the whole mystery, involves to the worthy communicant an actual participation in the substance of his person under this view. This participation is not

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[12] Ibid., p. 55.

> simply in his Spirit, but in his flesh also and blood. It is not figurative merely and moral, but real, substantial and essential.[13]

Likewise, care was taken to avoid a Roman and Lutheran understanding. The Reformed doctrine admitted no change whatever in the elements: bread remains bread and wine remains wine. There is no abiding binding of Christ's presence in the elements;[14] his presence is connected with the sacramental use of the elements. The Lord's body is not received orally, that is, physically. Participation of Christ's flesh and blood is spiritual only and in no sense corporal, local presence being entirely rejected. The reception is by faith. Christ is present in fruition for believers, the impenitent and unbelieving receiving only naked symbols without any advantage for their souls.

Calvin was even willing to use the term "real presence" if understood as true presence, i.e., one that brings the believer into communion with Christ in his human nature as well as his divine nature. But, as Nevin explains, to guard against making "real presence" mean local, corporal presence, Calvin added "spiritual." Thus it is a "real" presence in opposition to the idea that Christ's flesh and blood are not made present in any way; a "spiritual" real presence, to oppose the idea that Christ's

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[13] Ibid., p. 58.

[14] Nevin stresses his own understanding by speaking of presence through the elements. Thus, he speaks of the word which reaches us "through these sacramental symbols" in "Undying Life in Christ," a sermon delivered in 1863 cited in Appel, op. cit., p. 627.

body is in the elements in a local or corporal way. It is participation in the Savior's life, as human, subsisting in glory in a true bodily form, whose living energy is made over to the communicant to make him more one with Christ and more an heir of the immortality that is in Christ.

Two important points in Nevin's explanation of Calvin's theology of the Eucharist remain to be clarified. First, the sacrament has an objective force. It is not a mere sign, nor is its virtue put into it by the faith of the believer, although faith is necessary for fruition.[15] "It is the condition of its efficacy for the communicant, but not the principle of the power itself."[16] The signs are in this sense also seals authenticating the reality of grace in the sacrament. Secondly, the grace of the sacrament is the substantial life of the Savior in his human nature particularly. He became flesh for the life of the world, "and our communion with him involves a real participation in him as the principle of life under this form."[17]

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[15] Ibid., p. 74 n. "That the 'Calvinist' of modern date has too often fallen into the contradiction of making faith creative, in the sacrament, rather than receptive, is indeed most painfully true. But in doing so he has fallen away entirely from the standpoint of the man whose name he professes to honour. Whether this standpoint is to be held itself responsible for the apostacy, is another question, perfectly legitimate and of immense practical importance; which it becomes the friends of the Reformed Church to look steadily in the face. If Calvinism--the system of Geneva--necessarily runs here into Zwinglianism, we may, indeed, well despair of the whole interest. For most assuredly no church can stand, that is found to be constitutionally unsacramental."

[16] The Mystical Presence, p. 61.

[17] Ibid., p. 62.

Just as a rationalistic view of the eucharist is impossible within Calvin's sacramental theology, so neither is a rationalistic view of the church possible according to Nevin's principle that one's view of the Lord's supper conditions his view of the church. The church is not the creation of those who constitute it any more than the real presence of Christ to the community is the result of their faith. It is not a gathering of those who by some prior means have achieved salvation, but it is the objective and historical medium of the saving presence of Christ for believers. Because Christ is present to the community the individual christian can share in his life by the Spirit. Nevin explained this communion with Christ as spiritual feeding upon the flesh and blood born of Mary so that his real, human life is conveyed to the believer. The man of faith becomes a sharer in his sacred body. Nevin's explanation of the use of "sacred body" as a description of the church clarifies the connection among Christ, the church, and the christian. The christian meets Christ in the church. "Sacred body" may be used of the church because the totality of Christ's life including his substantial humanity is in the church. The result is that "to be incorporated with the church, in this sense, is to be incorporated with Christ at the same time in his true human life."[18]

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[18] Ibid., p. 90. But Nevin notes that the Heidelberg Catechism itself upon which he was commenting has no reference to the church in this connection; especially not to the church in any such external view as the use of the term implies. The "sacred body" to which believers are united more deeply, in the Catechism's view, is his own proper person in human form, now exalted. And Calvin expressly rejects any such idea that the body

2. The Church as a Mystical Union of Believers in Christ

Beyond commenting upon Calvin's theology of the eucharist, in The Mystical Presence Nevin presents his own ideas of the eucharist as a deepening of our mystical union with Christ and a heightening of its meaning through his real presence. Through mystical union with Christ[19] our humanity has been raised in an immanent way to a new human life in Christ in whom human nature was joined to the Logos as a permanent source of life. This life was thereby introduced into the center of humanity for the purpose of re-creating it and of giving it new meaning and power--"the supernatural linking itself to the onward flow of the world's life." The new creation resulting from sharing in Christ's human life constitutes the church, his body, which follows the normal life processes. As Nevin describes it, Christ gathers the world into his own person, he "stretches over it the law of his own life" to become its root for a growth process terminating in resurrection. The communication of Christ's human life to consciously receptive persons is the mystical union. It is the sharing of his entire humanity with our entire humanity so that our bodies are affected as well. The power of his generic life is shared, resulting in union which is neither moral nor physical, but personal. It is a participation "in the substance of his person," in his life as human subsisting in

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of Christ to which we are united in the sacrament is to be understood merely as the church. Ibid., note.

[19]A detailed explanation of what is summarized here is given in The Mystical Presence, pp. 164-177.

glory in a true bodily form. The whole person of Christ unites with the whole person of the believer.

Christ is always personally present in the church in the way just described. It is presence without locality through the medium of the Holy Spirit whose presence implies Christ's. Through the Spirit Christ's life is formed in his people; and in that sense it is called spiritual, not to distinguish it from real presence and life but to avoid a crude physicism.

For the new life to achieve the effect of its power, one must surrender to it in faith. Faith is the medium for its introduction into man and is the condition of its growth toward "the ultimate outburst of the life" at the resurrection. Then the perfection of individuals will be accomplished "in connection with the consummation of the church as a whole."[20] Our attention is drawn again to the communal aspect of the church. The life given to the individual through the church reaches its fulfillment in conjunction with the church as a whole.

In the Lord's supper the great mystery of christianity which terminates in mystical union is "concentrated into a single visible transaction by which it is made as it were transparent to the senses and caused to pass before us in immediate living representation."[21] As Nevin describes the eucharist, in accents familiar to the Roman Catholic who views it as a sacramental sacrifice, the grace of the mystery is

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[20] Ibid., p. 177.

[21] Ibid., p. 247.

objectively present in signs for fruitful reception. And these signs--"the elements are the pledge of his actual presence and power"--refer to the atoning sacrifice inviting believers to share in the fruit of the body broken and the blood shed of the sacrificed Christ. Christian life involves "a constant return to it" and "appropriating the power of it more and more" as the only ground of our salvation.

> The Lord's supper, accordingly, concentrating in itself as it does, in some sense, the force and meaning of the whole christian life, has regard to this sacrifice always as the great object of its representation. It is the sacrament of Christ's death, the communion of his body and blood.[22]

Appropriation of the power of the sacrifice and the covenant which it sealed is by participation in the risen life of him by whom the sacrifice was made and who is really present in the sacramental transaction.

> His presence is identified objectively with the sacrament itself and we receive him in the sacrament as the bearer of his very life itself in the form in which it is here presented to our view. This implies no opus operatum, no mechanical or magical force in the use of the elements. All is by the Spirit; and for the communicant himself, all hangs upon the condition of faith.[23]

For fruitful reception regeneration is not enough--the person must be "in the exercise of the faith at the time." Although the force of the sacrament "is in the sacrament itself," our faith is "the condition that is needed to make room for it in our souls."[24]

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[22] Ibid., p. 180.

[23] Ibid., p. 182.

[24] Ibid., p. 183.

The participation is wholly spiritual leaving no room for an explanation of the manner of presence along the lines of either consubstantiation or transubstantiation. Nevin's understanding of the latter is, by contemporary Roman Catholic standards, a rather primitive physicism. At any rate, as he conceived both of these ideas, they were "chargeable with the error of supposing an identification of Christ's presence in the eucharist with the elements as such."[25] Following Calvin, his explanation of the presence is not bound to the symbols themselves considered separate from the transaction. It is not bound to the bread and wine, but to the act of eating and drinking by which the partaker in faith shares fruitfully in the body and blood of Christ's atoning sacrifice.

> The outward transaction, where faith is at hand, involves this inward fruition and forms the vehicle or channel by which it is accomplished. But the outward is not itself the form or mode in which the inward takes place. The participation of Christ is wholly spiritual. He communicates himself, by the Spirit, to the soul of the believer in a central way according to the general law of the new creation to which this mystery belongs. No room is left here for the supposition of a mere corporal communication, the transference of Christ's life directly into the bodies of his people, even though conceived to be in a hyperphysical way.[26]

Again following Nevin's principle, the Lord's supper may be seen as a concentrated sign expressing the whole life of the church. Through it one may see the presence and lifepower of Christ's atoning sacrifice as the fruit of his promise of constant presence in the church. Through

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[25] Ibid., p. 184; see note 14 where Nevin is cited as speaking of presence "through these sacramental symbols."

[26] Ibid., p. 184.

the Spirit believers, by constant return to the source of life, grow in real life union with Christ. He is objectively, really and personally present to the church always but his presence is through sign and symbol and the power of the Holy Spirit. In communicating in his life in this way, a personal union with the believer results, the whole person of Christ uniting with the whole of the believer.[27] This presence and union is celebrated and heightened in the concentrated sign of the church's life which is the eucharist.

3. The Church as a Community of Faith Sharing in Christ's Sacrifice

Agreeing with "the more important modern commentators," Nevin did not allow any direct reference to the Lord's supper in John 6:51-58 so far as the historical institution was concerned, but the idea which the passage develops, he thought, is the same as the content of the theology of the supper. In each case, Christ speaks of his sacrifice for the life of the world.

> All must feel the close correspondence that holds between what is here said and the terms afterwards employed in the institution of the Lord's supper. Here as there, the participation of the believer in Christ is made to stand particularly in eating his flesh and drinking his blood. . . . It is by his death he is constituted the author of eternal life to all that turn towards him for this purpose. Except you eat the flesh of the Son of Man, and drink his blood, ye have no life in you.[28]

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[27] Ibid., p. 158.

[28] Ibid., p. 239.

The whole force of the life in Christ which became effective in the sacrifice "may be regarded as concentrated in the idea of the atonement." He is "bread of life." To share the life we must participate actually and truly in his life, as it was made an offering for sin. "This it is emphatically that constitutes him the bread which came down from heaven, of which if any man eat he shall live forever." To eat his flesh and drink his blood is to possess life and salvation as comprehended in his person and received through faith in this form. Salvation is not some abstract laying hold of the merits of Christ. The bread of life is Christ as slain received into the believer and made one with him by the power of the Spirit. Unless we eat his flesh and drink his blood, we can have no life.

> The participation itself involves everlasting life; not simply in the form of hope and promise, but in the way of actual present possession; and not simply as a mode of existence for the soul abstractly considered, but as embracing the whole man in the absolute totality of his nature and reaching out to the resurrection of the body itself as its legitimate and necessary end.[29]

Could language such as St. John uses leave any doubt, Nevin asked "that the salvation which we have by Christ, including his whole mediatorial grace, comes to us only by the communication of his own life?"[30]

The bearing of this passage in John 6 upon the question of the Eucharist seemed evident to the author of The Mystical Presence. Although it had no direct reference to the ordinance, but refers to the christian life

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[29] Ibid., p. 241.

[30] Ibid.

in general, still the idea is the same that is presented in the institution of the supper under a different form. If what Nevin explained about chapter six in John in its implications for the general or extra-sacramental life of the church could be admitted, "it will not be possible to resist the impression, that the sacrament itself can involve, to say the least, nothing less."[31] And, for what is important in this study, the reverse is true as well, those who "deny a real communication with Christ's person in the eucharist, must in the nature of the case deny also a real extra-sacramental union with him to the same extent."[32] The general life of the christian and the communion of the sacrament, while they are not simply the same thing, are intimately connected, i.e., "the order of life comprehended in the two cases is the same."[33] If one views the new life of the christian as a moral relation only to the Saviour, the power of the sacrament will be seen in the same order. But if it is seen as a real incorporation with Christ, the sacrament will be effective through more than mere good thoughts and feelings: It must involve too a real participation in Christ's life.

The Lord's supper must always be viewed in relation to the whole new creation in Christ in its historical manifestation which is the church. The supernatural in Christ cannot ever be isolated in the historical

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[31] Ibid., p. 243.

[32] Ibid.

[33] Ibid.

person of Jesus and must never be sundered from the life of his body which is the church. It is there made permanent and historical and corresponds with the form of the supernatural as in Christ himself originally--it is one and the same life. "The church must have a true theanthropic character throughout," a continuing revelation of God in the flesh. If this is conceded, the relation between church and the Lord's supper must be evident. "The mystery of Christianity is here concentrated into a single visible transaction." It is the most graphic picture of salvation; and to be a true sacrament, a seal of salvation, it need only be seen as part of the whole supernatural constitution which is the church.

> Low views of the sacrament betray invariably a low view of the church also, as that new and higher order of life in which the power of this mystery continues to reveal itself through all ages. . . . [And thus] let it be felt that the church is, in very deed, the depository and continuation of the Saviour's theanthropic life itself . . . and it is easy to understand how naturally and necessarily, at the same time we must be led to see the mystery of the holy eucharist, epitome as it is of the mystery of the christian salvation itself, in a corresponding light.[34]

A right understanding of the eucharist comprehends that through the elements there is offered the substance of the new covenant in Christ's death. In the eucharist there is "a living connection with the sacrifice itself."

> The bread and wine are not Christ's flesh and blood as such; they are only, (but this in a real objective way) the new covenant in his death, made actual by pledge and seal under this outward form. Still a participation in the covenant requires and implies, in the

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[34] Ibid., p. 248.

> nature of the case, a participation in the very life by which alone the expiatory value of the covenant can have any reality or force. The paschal lamb must be eaten, physically incorporated with the life of the worshiper to give him part in the covenant of which it was the seal. . . . Communion with the covenant, involves of necessity communion with the sacrifice. All fleshly conceptions are to be of course excluded.[35]

Communion with the sacrifice is necessary for participation in the saving action of the Christ; it is a communion which is more than figurative or moral. "It is the communion of Christ's body and blood--a real participation in his true human life, as the one only and all-sufficient sacrifice for the sins of the world."[36]

In the year which saw the publication of The Mystical Presence, the Philadelphia Classis, in protest over the Synod of York's exoneration of Dr. Nevin, reasserted its charges against him. And the Classis' chief spokesman, Dr. Joseph Berg, initiated a debate with the "heretical" author in the pages of the Weekly Messenger, a debate which lasted into the Spring of 1848. Meanwhile no significant American review of Nevin's book had appeared until April, 1848 when the Princeton Review published a review by Professor Charles Hodge. The fact that he had admittedly let the book lie on his desk for nearly two years for want of interest in such themes reflects the degree of unconcern about sacraments which Nevin was confronting. Nevin knew the importance of the review, for Princeton was one of the best faculties in the country and Hodge was the

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[35] Ibid., p. 253.

[36] Ibid., p. 254.

"central theological organ" of the old school Presbyterians. The author responded to his reviewer in twelve unusually long articles in the Weekly Messenger from May through August of 1848, the argument with Berg having thus terminated for this more important opponent. After the Mercersburg Review had been founded to fill the "need of a general medium in which his more elaborate articles might appear in a permanent form,"[37] Professor Nevin reprinted part of the series against Hodge as an article in the second volume of the Review (1850). As one contemporary church historian writes, it "constituted one of the first significant American contributions to the history of theology."[38] Whereas Nevin's argument resembles the work of a modern scholar, "Hodge's is still the production of an orthodox scholastic, with no sense for the meaning and movement of history."[39] Nevin showed how the Reformed tradition had grown in the midst of conflicting tendencies in Switzerland, and he presented Calvin as the source of its clarification. The important doctrinal confessions he showed to be those bearing Calvin's mark. This was true of the great national confessions which acquired a superiority over earlier symbols; thus the authority of the Gallic, Scotic, Belgic, Second Helvetic confessions and the Heidelberg catechism. It was from these and from their source of

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[37]Theodore Appel, The Life and Work of John Williamson Nevin (Philadelphia, 1889), p. 299.

[38]Nichols, Romanticism in American Theology, p. 89.

[39]Nichols, ibid.

inspiration that Nevin educed the Reformed teaching on the Lord's supper.

The difference in interpretation between Nevin and Hodge concerning the development of theological thought centered on a dogmatic point crucial for the understanding of both the eucharist and the doctrine of justification, and consequently crucial for understanding the church. As Nevin wrote:

> Two phases of thought, it is admitted, come together to a certain extent in the early history of the Reformed doctrine, one which lays all stress on the sacrifice of Christ as an atonement for sin and another, specially insisted upon Calvin, which carried back our salvation to the idea of Christ's life as its necessary perpetual source and ground. This latter view, it is allowed also, made the human side of Christ's life to be in some mysterious way the depositary and seat of the grace now mentioned [i.e., salvation], and so the medium of its communication to our souls.[40]

In the traditional view of the sixteenth century, participation in the Lord's supper was held to bring to the believer a "vivific power" from the Savior's flesh, from his humanity now exalted. In Hodge's opinion, however, this teaching was never fixed in the tradition, although it was part of the teaching for a time as a relic of the old Roman superstition which it was hard to put aside. In the sacrament, as Nevin's former professor saw it, we have to do only with the value of Christ's death as a propitiation for sin remembered under symbols and not with the life-giving virtue from his body sacramentally present. If there is any objective force in the sacra-

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[40]"Doctrine of the Reformed Church on the Lord's Supper," MR 2 (1850), 448. The articles in WM which preceded this article appeared from May 24 - August 9, 1848.

ment, it is the influence of the Holy Spirit. But he is active in the same way as at other extra-sacramental times bringing believers into communication with God's truth and grace. The grace is wholly external, the sacrament being just the occasion for bringing to mind a general grace which is always at hand with or without the sacrament. Sacramental grace is no objective reality, and the relation between grace and the signs is entirely external and quite loose.

This exchange with Hodge is helpful for the expression it gives to a popular memorialism in which the Lord's supper appears to be no more than an occasion for remembering under symbols the value of Christ's death. But beyond that it clarifies to some extent Nevin's understanding of the role of the Spirit in the eucharist. While he speaks of the presence of Christ in the eucharist as being by the Spirit, it is clear that he means something much more than the normal functioning of the Spirit in the church. His emphasis on the presence of Christ by the Spirit is to stress a non-corporal, non-physical presence, not to underplay or oppose the reality of his presence in a heightened, concentrated way in this transaction.

Hodge's view reflects the earlier Reformed tradition's emphasis on sacrifice. But, as Nevin indicated, Calvin joined the second aspect of life to sacrifice in a balanced presentation. As he notes, "with Calvin, the idea of a life-union with Christ stood not at all in the way of the sacrificial interest, which it had been the great object of Zwingli and the first Swiss divines generally to assert." The merit of Christ from Calvin's

point of view, and so with the later confessions which reflect his thought, was something real and concrete which could not be sundered from the life to which it belonged.

> Christ first, and then his merit; the life of the Son of Man made ours in order to a true and full interest in the wealth of this life. Such was the steady, unvarying order of Calvin's creed. . . . And in this form it passed into all the later Reformed Confessions; not with the sacrifice certainly of the old Zwinglian way of looking at this subject, but so, at the same time, as to carry this forward to its full sense by coupling it with the idea of the mystical union, completing thus the whole doctrine in the proper combination of its two different sides.[41]

The two ideas of sacrifice and life mutually support and require one another.[42] The sacrifice could not be fruitful without a real communication in the life of him who was sacrificed. The Reformed tradition "sought to hold together here the objective and subjective sides of the christian salvation."

Nevin's study of the eucharist in Cyprian had shown him that in the early church the belief was that the sacrament of the supper carried in it the force of a sacrifice or offering. There was communion, it was believed, with Christ's body broken and blood shed, as in the Reformed teaching. As he came to know the eucharistic belief of Cyprian's time,

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[41] Ibid., p. 459.

[42] Nevin speaks of the sacrifice having power, virtue. His entire theology must reject any understanding of "sacrifice" which would render its vitality a matter of recollection. "The atonement holds in the death of Christ, but only in this as swallowed up by the power of His victorious resurrection. It has no existence on the outside of His life." (Italics mine.) In "Once for All," MR 17 (1870), 107.

the atonement was present not as remembered doctrine merely but in its own power "as a sacrifice always well pleasing to God." He concluded:

> No idea is more familiar to the mind of the ancient church, than that by which the eucharist is regarded as a service analogous with the offerings of the old testament. . . . We have seen how Cyprian speaks continually of the "altar" and "priesthood" in this relation, and of "offering" or "sacrificing" as terms of one import with the celebration of the Lord's supper.[43]

In 1852 when Nevin wrote the Cyprian articles, he was non-committal about accepting the eucharist as sacrifice to be offered in the manner in which the Fathers spoke of it to him. They modeled the offering upon the priestly sacrifice of the Old Testament. But he was quite positive in rejecting the idea in the course of reviewing Robert Isaac Wilberforce's book on the eucharist in 1854.[44] Wilberforce and Nevin were both influenced by German theologians and shared many positions on the eucharist, but Nevin could not accept the ancient view of sacrifice presented by Wilberforce, although he conceded that the evidence for his case reflected well the belief of the church of the first ages. Of this evidence, he wrote:

> The church in the first ages held universally that the christian ministry was a real priesthood that the so-called altar at which it served was an altar in truth and not simply in name, that a real offering was made upon it in the solemnity of the eucharist, that this offering was nothing less than the body of Christ there present

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[43]"Cyprian," MR 4 (1852), 380.

[44]"Wilberforce on the Eucharist," MR 6 (1854), 161-187. A review of The Doctrine of the Holy Eucharist by Robert Isaac Wilberforce.

> in the consecrated elements, that in this form the one sacrifice of the cross . . . was exhibited before God for the sins of men.[45]

The Calvinist doctrine of "a real participation of Christ's body and blood in the eucharist as a transaction" was, as far as he was concerned, a positive development from the ancient belief. It was a middle position between the Zwinglian and what he understood to be the Roman eucharistic teaching--the presence of Christ in the elements and the subsequent offering of these as a sacrifice of thanksgiving and propitiation by the priest.

4. The Church as a Worshipping Community

Nevin's concept of worship in general and of the eucharistic liturgy in particular complements the description of the church which has evolved from a consideration of the interrelation between the eucharist and the church. His theological emphasis on the objective power of the life of Christ in the church and on its corporate nature was reflected in his requisite for worship. Soon after the publication of The Mystical Presence he wrote about the power of christian worship consisting in worshippers being filled with the sense of a common life in the church. The concept of worship requires that "it should move in the sphere of the objective and not fall over to the sway of simply individual thought or feeling."[46] The worshipper is expected to subject himself in faith to the objective life power in the sacraments, and the minister as well is to submerge his

[45] Ibid., p. 180.

[46] Antichrist: or the Spirit of Sect and Schism (New York, 1848), pp. 53-54.

individuality in order to represent the corporate body, expressing its thought in set forms. These ideas, proposed in 1848, were the antithesis of the "free," non-liturgical worship then prevalent in the American churches.

The progress of a strong liturgical tendency in early nineteenth century Germany was affecting the German Reformed Church in America "most especially through Dr. Rauch and Dr. Schaff."[47] By 1849 there was sufficient interest that a Committee was set up to study the question of liturgical worship with Dr. Nevin as Chairman. Reflecting on the proposed work of the Committee, the Chairman, who could not separate liturgy from theology, wrote in the newly founded Mercersburg Review that "our liturgy will take its character and complexion finally from the end it is designated to serve." If it is considered a mere outward help, "a sort of crutch to assist the decent conduct of our sanctuary devotions," it will have a mechanical character.[48] It will be reflecting an underlying theology which rejects objective life-bearing sacraments.

From 1851 the Committee under the new chairmanship of Philip Schaff--Nevin had in the meantime retired--worked to produce A Liturgy; or Order of Christian Worship in 1857. It was a provisional liturgy; and when finally its revision was at hand, the reactivated Committee sought to

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[47]Appel, The Life and Work of John Williamson Nevin, p. 481.

[48]"The Liturgical Movement," MR 1 (1849), 611.

survey the mind of the church to determine how the revision should proceed. Should the emphasis be upon an altar liturgy or a pulpit liturgy? Dr. Nevin, once again active in the church, was assigned the task of preparing a report which would in his words, "bring the whole subject as plainly as possible before the church." In his 1862 report, we have Nevin's understanding of an altar liturgy.[49]

An altar liturgy is directly opposed to a pulpit one, the latter a mechanical view in which liturgy is a service book of examples and forms for prayers allowing a kind of worship superior to the "free" form, but nonetheless centered on the pulpit. An altar liturgy, on the other hand, involves a different doctrine of worship entirely. In this view liturgy is

> A whole order or scheme rather of public worship, in which all the parts are inwardly bound together by their having a common relation to the idea of a christian altar, and by their referring themselves through this always to what must be considered the last ground of all true christian worship, the mystical presence of Christ in the holy eucharist.[50]

Such an understanding of liturgy implies a theology at the opposite pole from a pulpit liturgy.

First, such a liturgy is ruled throughout by the sense of the sacramental in religion, that is, of the presence of the supernatural under a ritual or visible form. Central to this understanding of Christianity is the

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[49]The Liturgical Question, A Report by the "Liturgical Committee," prepared by John W. Nevin (Philadelphia, 1862).

[50]Ibid., p. 23.

Lord's supper; around this the worship of the church has revolved from the beginning.

> No liturgy, then, can be worthy of its name which is not framed in such way as to make the sacrament of the Lord's supper its cardinal office, while all its other offices and parts are so ordered as, silently at least, to come under some inward relation to this and to take from it their key note and reigning tone.[51]

Second, an altar liturgy must have "a certain priestly character." This implies a sense of the mystical element in worship, the sacramental quality referred to above. Where there is no sense of the mystical in worship, "growing forth from its universal centre in the sacrament of Christ's body and blood," then there can be no sympathy for the priestly element "with its conceptions of altar and sacrifice drawn from the same source."

> Seeing the root and foundation of all Christian worship to be in the mystical presence of Christ in the sacrament of the holy supper and seeing in this again the exhibition of his broken body and shed blood as the actually present virtue of his one offering of himself . . . , it requires that some earnest be made with these sacrificial ideas so that they shall be felt to carry with them the power of a real transaction at the time with God, based on something beyond the minds of the worshippers themselves.[52]

Third, Nevin wrote that the idea of a liturgy in the altar sense involves a correspondence with the movement of Christian life in the form known as the church year. Here, as in the first two considerations above, there is shown a sense of "objectively real facts, of perennial power and

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[51] Ibid., p. 26.

[52] Ibid., pp. 26-28.

force in the world."

> There is an inward connection, in some way, between the sense for the sacramental in worship and what may be termed a sense for church festivals and the idea of a church year.[53]

Finally, in such a liturgy there is required the active cooperation of the people with the minister. Passivity alone and worship in thought is not enough. Liturgy is the doing of a communal work that cannot go forward without the people's cooperation. Thus,

> The people must so join in what is going forward, that this shall seem to be for them plainly a real objective work then and there taking place, in which they are themselves not spectators or hearers only, but participant actors.[54]

An altar liturgy must be based, as the provisional liturgy had been, on a theological undergirding which makes it "churchly, sacramental, and in proper measure also priestly."[55] Nevin had capsuled his ideas on sacrament and sacrifice some three years before the 1862 Liturgical Committee report. He wrote:

> A fixed scheme or system of worship, starting from the transaction of the Holy Eucharist, and everywhere resting on this as its original ground, in the use of which from week to week by ministers and people, it is made possible for them to offer themselves with joint action, their persons, praises and prayers, in the way of a living sacrifice to God, on the altar graciously consecrated for this purpose, through the death of his Son, in the bosom of the Christian Church. (Italics mine.)[56]

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[53] Ibid., pp. 29-30.

[54] Ibid., p. 33.

[55] Ibid., p. 38.

[56] "The Idea of a Liturgy," Weekly Messenger, June 15, 1859.

Liturgical worship means a real sacrificial oblation of the church. Christ's worshipping people are to be associated with the once-for-all sacrifice of perennial power sacramentally exhibited in the eucharist. In this sense the priestly role of Christ as well as the prophetic and kingly roles can be participated in by Christians.[57]

But not all in the German Reformed Church accepted the concept of an altar liturgy. An opposing camp was headed by Nevin's former liturgical ally, J. H. A. Bomberger. Bomberger, whose report at the Synod of Norristown in 1849 had initiated the liturgical movement of the German Reformed Church and whose two articles in the Mercersburg Review had defended Nevin against his attackers,[58] defected in 1861 to lead the opponents of the altar liturgy. The provisional liturgy was characterized by its altar liturgy, and Bomberger felt that such was not the mind of the church. It was surely not his mind. It was Nevin's opinion that Bomberger would have subjected the provisional liturgy to "vandalism," cutting out what reflected the altar spirit. As Bomberger saw it, the Liturgical Committee had used ramrod tactics in the production of the provisional liturgy and was using the same method to get its views into the proposed revision. The General Synod of Dayton in 1866, stirred by the "one-sided and unfair" tract written by Dr. Bomberger condemning the provisional

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[57] Ibid.

[58] MR 5 (1853), 89-123; 145-180.

liturgy and its proposed revised form as "ritualistic," requested for publication John Nevin's viewpoint of the history of the provisional liturgy's formation and a criticism of its merits. He complied with Vindication of the Revised Liturgy in which the theological character of the new liturgy is explained.[59]

The discussion of the liturgy at Dayton in 1866 had been, as Nevin noted, "an earnest theological discussion."

> It was not so much dissatisfaction with single doctrinal statements here and there in the liturgy, as hostility rather to its whole doctrinal basis that roused and led on the war for its destruction. The Liturgy represented one system of religious thought; the opposition to it represented another; the two constitutionally different, and mutually repellent.[60]

As Dr. Nevin drew the lines, the camps were divided into the "Puritanic" scheme of theology--"it admits within it different constructions, Calvinistic, Arminian, Methodist, Baptistic, and so on in all manner of sect forms"--against the liturgy-prone scheme based on a Christocentric, credal, historical and objective theology. There is an inner connection between the characteristics of the latter kind of theology.

> They run into one another, and require one another to be in any sense, complete. A theology which is truly Christocentric must follow the Creed, must be objective, must be historical with this, must be churchly; and with this again, must be sacramental and liturgical. It must be liturgical, moreover, in a sense agreeing

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[59](Philadelphia, 1867) The second half of Vindication reprints an article, "Theology of the New Liturgy," MR 14 (1867), 23-66.

[60]Ibid., p. 52.

> with these affinities throughout. . . . It can never be satisfied with anything less than an altar liturgy. (Italics mine.) [61]

The liturgy is a work of the people in which the life of Christ as root of all Christianity is shared in the manner in which the creed speaks. Faith in Christ opens the way to share in the life which is constitutionally present in the historical church and which is made manifest, celebrated, or signed in the sacraments. The liturgy is seen as the outcropping of the life which is in the church in an objective and historical way. Since for a liturgically sympathetic scheme of theology, all revelation is an objective manifestation which causes God's presence to be felt in the world, a subjective communion with the revelation must come in connection with the objective fact. God does not speak to the souls of men abruptly and immediately, but "the order of all true supernatural teaching is the objective first and the subjective or experimental afterwards, as something brought to pass only by its means."[62]

> True it cannot save men without their being brought to experience its power on which account it is that we need to be placed in communication with it through faith; but the power that saves is not, for this reason, in our experience or faith. It is wholly in the object with which our faith is concerned. [63]

Sense for the objective leads to a sense for the historical, while "those who make all of subjectivity are sure to be unhistorical."[64] Only

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[61] Ibid., p. 71.

[62] Ibid., p. 66.

[63] Ibid., p. 66-67.

[64] Ibid., p. 67.

as faith in Christ is historical "can it be felt to be real, and not simply notional and visionary."

The liturgy was for Nevin the manifestation of the existence of the continuing life of the incarnation in the world; it showed forth the conjunction of the supernatural and the natural in an abiding economy of grace. The Office of Holy Communion in the new liturgy presented the eucharist as a medium of "a real mystical communion" with the glorified life. Considering his understanding of the relation between the Lord's supper and the church, it may be said that Nevin was describing characteristics of the church reflected in the eucharist when he wrote about the Office of Holy Communion:

> It teaches that the Lord's supper is more than an outward sign and more than a mere calling to mind of our Saviour's death as something past and gone. It teaches that the value of Christ's sacrifice never dies, but is perennially continued in the power of his life. It teaches the outward side of the sacrament is mystically bound by the Holy Ghost to its inward invisible side . . . so that the undying power of Christ's life and sacrifice are there, in the transaction, for all who take part in it with faith. It teaches that it is our duty to appropriate this grace, and to bring it before God (the "memorial of the blessed sacrifice of his Son") as the only ground of our trust and confidence in his presence.[65]

Accordingly, the church itself is not an arrangement based upon some outward sign but is a union in the undying life of Christ's sacrifice. The external elements in the church are related to and are in service to its inner life. That life is present in the church by the Holy Spirit for all who participate in faith. In this way, by appropriating his grace one comes before God in Christ as the ground of trust and confidence.

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[65]Ibid., pp. 92-93.

5. Summary

Nevin makes much of the principle that one's view of the Lord's supper must condition his conception of the church. This study of the theology and liturgy of the eucharist has yielded some further insights therefore for a description of the church. In view of the considerations of this chapter it may be said that the church is the visible, historical source of Christ's life in which the fruit of his atoning sacrifice is offered to believers by the Holy Spirit. This abiding offer is celebrated in the eucharist in a concentrated sign of his presence in the church. In this way a communion is formed of those who, through faith and an active participation, accept the offered, objectively present life of Christ's risen humanity. The church may further be described as a communion of those who by their acceptance of Christ's gift of himself are mystically united to God by means of a personal union with Christ.

It is this communion in the life of Christ through a common faith which undergirds the church. Upon communion in this underlying source of life and upon the biblical faith which structures the communion, and not upon any external, human agreement, the ultimate unity of the church depends. The future of the church awaits the return of its branches to the sources of christianity and the re-evaluation of all that has accrued to them over centuries. In the light of the sources and in view of communion in the life of Christ the branches of christianity may learn to accept what is good and faithful in each other. These questions are the concern of the following chapter.

CHAPTER V

THE CHURCH OF THE FUTURE

In a previous chapter life in the church was disclosed as giving rise to those functions and organs necessary for the growth of the church. The present chapter extends this concept applying it to the dimensions of the church whose final stage will come as the result of a life process at work in it. It shows that the church in its historical growth may be expected to vary its structural forms accidentally while remaining true in substance to its ancient faith.

The church of the future which will make the hope for Christian unity visible and real must, in Nevin's opinion, substantially adhere to the ancient faith as expressed in the creeds and be open to historical developments such as the medieval Roman church and the Reformation, each of which emphasized true aspects of Christianity. Both Protestantism and Roman Catholicism emphasize facets of the Christian life which are complementary and which help clarify the wholeness or catholicity of the church to which both streams of Christianity must ultimately submit. In church union there must be free submission of the parts to this wholeness; that is, the surrender of denominational confessions to the "holy, catholic church" of the ancient creeds and those historical developments which are

in the spirit of the creeds. John Nevin's anguish over the state of Protestantism, which reached crisis proportions in the early 1850's was caused by his concern whether its development, in face of a widespread sectarian mentality and unchurchly bent, was an authentic outgrowth of the organism offering hope for Christian unity.

1. Process Toward a More Perfect State

Writing in 1845 concerning his sermon on "Catholic Unity," Dr. Nevin expressed the opinion that "of all themes the most momentous at this time is the true idea of the church."[1] His own understanding was, by his admission, "directly opposed" to those prevailing in American Protestantism. His understanding of what would promote unity was likewise antithetical to prevailing opinion. The text chosen for the sermon hints at the direction of his thinking. Ephesians 4:4-6 assumes that unity is already in existence among Christians and that therefore they are bound to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. Unity is "not something which results first from the thought and purpose" of the church's membership, but "is the ground out of which this membership itself springs."[2] Particular Christians, congregations, and denominations are true to the church's consciousness of unity only to the degree that they

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[1]Introduction to "Catholic Unity," an appendix to Philip Schaff's Principle of Protestantism, p. 191.

[2]"Catholic Unity," ibid., p. 194.

respect it and "make it the object of their calling to fulfill its requisitions."[3] Unity does not exclude difference and multiplicity but demands that "in principle" denominations should be the same, actuated by "the power of a common life" the whole of which is "ultimately or fundamentally" in Christ.[4] The outward, visible unity lacking in the church was a defect but an understandable one, for "it is seldom that the actual, in the sphere of Christianity, fully corresponds with the ideal."[5] The unity of life in Christ within the church, despite defective external unity caused by denominational distinctions, "is still actively at work in every evangelical communion."[6] Though the "one Body" was wanting for the present, the "one Spirit" bound the denominations as a spiritual whole. But no denomination could rest at ease with such defective unity. If the church is really called to visible unity, difficulties are not likely to be considered as "insuperable" in achieving the end, and Christians are less likely to acquiesce in the present disunity. If one can say that denominations may be considered the necessary though temporary fruit of the Reformation then the latter "has not yet been conducted forward to its last legitimate result in this respect," for both the Reformation and church unity are from the one God.[7]

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[3] Ibid., p. 194.

[4] Ibid., p. 195.

[5] Ibid., p. 202.

[6] Ibid.

[7] Ibid., p. 206.

The prayer of Christ will be fulfilled but only after disunity is admitted as "false and wrong" and the hearts of men are prepared to seek "a more excellent way."[8] No stratagem or force will achieve it--unity must be free, "the spontaneous product of Christian knowledge and Christian love."[9]

Nevin's concern for the future of the church was expressed in another sermon, "The Church," preached in 1846 "to promote church feeling" or recognition of an objective life-bearing constitution in the world whose characteristics include visible unity.[10] The distinction which Nevin developed between the ideal church and the actual church allowed him to account for the existence of present defective unity without despairing of ultimate perfection. The actual church is a process of development within history, always pressing forward to completion, though always falling short of the ideal in any given period. The church in its root is one, holy, catholic, infallible; and its life in Christ is guarantee that it bears those qualities in its potential and in its term. The actual church may fall into sin, disunity, error, particularism, and so forth--it always contains "much that is to be expelled from it in the end." Visible disunity is one defect among others, but it cannot be remedied by unchurching all

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[8] Ibid.

[9] Ibid., p. 207.

[10] The Church (Chambersburg, 1847).

denominations and marshalling them into union by adhesion to one organization. The church "with its divine life powers is not confined to any one organization," but it extends itself "with different measures of power" over different communions.[11] Ultimately, internal and external unity will be achieved by sharing and complementarity, a solution which "The Church" permits but which Nevin did not develop until 1852 in an article entitled "Early Christianity."[12] For the present he was content to emphasize that sects, in so far as they belong at all to the church--and he suggests that some may not[13]--belong to it organically as component parts of the one life in the body whose unifying power is ever at work. Their existence cannot be justified in the terminal structure of the church of the future. Concerning this point Nevin wrote:

> We must believe that our sects therefore, however necessary, are something wrong; a most defective, abnormal condition of the body of Christ; an interimistic abomination, in the church but not of it, that is destined in due time to pass away, and which while it lasts all good men are bound to deplore. To justify the sect system as an order of things right in itself, or to cherish the spirit of sect in any way, is in direct opposition to all true faith in the Holy, Catholic Church.[14]

The church, toward which Christianity in process is moving, is to be characterized by a vital apprehension not just of the truth of the Word

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[11] Ibid., p. 14.

[12] "Early Christianity," Part Three, MR 4 (1852), 49.

[13] The Church, p. 21.

[14] Ibid., p. 22.

come as man but of the present fact "of permanent force in the history of humanity" which is his life continued in the church.[15] The church is a life process stemming from the fact of Christ. It is thus historical and has not only passed through different hands and experienced various outward forms but is, as all life is, evolutionary. This historical character of the church had been developed by Schaff in The Principle of Protestantism in 1845 and incorporated by Nevin into his understanding of organic Christianity.

In that same year, 1845, John Henry Newman had published his Essay on Development. Both authors received cool receptions in their own churches, for the religious outlook outside of Germany was prevailingly unhistorical. About Newman's study Nevin wrote seven years later that "few theological tracts in the English language are more worthy of being read." Certainly among the worthy tracts he would have recommended were those of his German colleague at Mercersburg to whom he is undoubtedly indebted for deepening his sense of historical continuity in Christianity and the need for development. But even before Schaff's arrival Nevin had a keen sense of history which he had absorbed from Neander, an awareness of the incompletion of the Reformation, and an understanding of the need for development within Protestantism.

The first public utterance which Schaff heard his American associate make was a plea for a reaction to a "bastard Protestantism" and a return

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[15] "Pseudo-Protestantism," WM, September 3, 1845.

to the principles of the Reformation. It was a request to press forward the work of the Reformation clothed "in the life that is enshrined in their ancient symbols." Two months later at his inaugural lecture Professor Schaff set forth a thesis which complied with Nevin's growing appreciation of history and tradition. It was a rival theory to the one proposed by their dogged adversary, Dr. Joseph Berg, who argued that the doctrine and practice of the Reformation came from the apostolic church unchanged, preserved by the medieval Waldenses. The Schaff thesis, that the papal church and not the Waldenses gave birth to Protestantism, was expanded into The Principle of Protestantism (1845). Nevin translated it as well as What Is Church History? (1846), which clarified the principles of the first book.[16]

There had been development, said Schaff, between the first century church and the medieval papacy, and between the latter and Protestantism. But any specific development, whether the papacy or Protestant denominations, while it might have justification and necessity relative to its historical situation, is not universally or permanently necessary. Even dogmas of ecumenical creeds are subject to correction by the scripture, according to Schaff. The continuity of the church could not be described in terms of either doctrine or church order. The metaphor guiding the

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[16]For a study of Philip Schaff's theory of historical development see John Charles Meyer, Philip Schaff's Concept of Organic Historiography As Related to the Development of Doctrine: A Catholic Appraisal (Ph. D., The Catholic University of America, 1968).

theory was that of biological growth in which there is inner life and unity through diverse stages of maturing, each of which is both a negation and completion of the preceding stage.

Both professors emphasized that the stream of life from Christ which is in the church today was, before the Reformation, mainly in the Roman Catholic Church. There is no chasm in the "outward and visible life of the church cutting off its later existence from the existence which it had in the beginning."[17] It was Nevin's "joyous conviction" that the same church has been "from first to last actively wrestling with the fulfillment of its mission" and has been moving "through vast corruptions, to a higher and better state in the future."[18]

A large portion of American Protestantism virtually denied any such possibility in order to cling to the popular theory that Christianity missed its mark from the post-apostolic age, got entangled with pagan philosophy and Jewish traditions, and fell continually into more deplorable aberrations until the Reformation. If the church is really historical, Nevin wrote, that is, "a constant genesis of new forms out of those that have gone before" then it follows "that the legitimacy of Protestantism turns altogether on its title to be regarded as the true and proper succession of this old catholic life."[19] It is rooted in an "imperishable

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[17]"True and False Protestantism," MR 1 (1849), 92.

[18]Ibid., pp. 91-93.

[19]Ibid., p. 95.

christianity;" and, in fact, "it is the life of the old Catholic Church itself reaching over thus by inward historical development to a new and higher form."[20] Protestantism is "the conservation of that ancient life" of the church advanced by the process of a thousand years to a new and higher ground.[21]

Thus the church is historical "not because it is the same thing forever, like a mountain or sea," but because it is "the power of a divine fact, which is forever growing itself into the consciousness, the interior life of the world."[22] The actual church is in process implying "new forms and stages of its apprehension continually," and thus it will never be complete "till the whole thinking and working of humanity shall appear transfixed with its glorious reconstructive power."[23] The present state of Protestantism, in process to its destined higher state, must then be regarded as "interimistic." It is in a period of transition

> . . . to some new and higher order in which finally its present deficiencies shall be supplied and its present diseases healed. . . . The Catholic and Protestant tendencies must come together, with inward organic union. . . . This implies of course no return to Romanism; it is all involved rather in the onward movement of Protestantism itself, and is simply the necessary form of its ultimate completion.[24]

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[20] Ibid., p. 96.

[21] Ibid., p. 98.

[22] "Historical Development," MR 1 (1849), 513.

[23] Ibid.

[24] "True and False Protestantism," MR 1 (1849), 100.

2. The Relative Value of Denominations

Antichrist[25] was the expansion of three sermons preached by Nevin in 1848, based upon 1 John 4:1-3. In it he explored heresy and schism regarding the person of Jesus Christ who is come in the flesh to be a new and higher source of life. With the nature and history of the problem explored, Nevin hoped that the way would be open for representing a remedy for the sect problem.

What he called "the sect plague of our age and nation" was a failure on the part of denominations to look upon themselves seriously as temporary bodies separated from the general body and "representing for the time a certain essential side of the common Christianity which must otherwise have been undervalued and wronged."[26] Denominations veer toward a sect mentality when they abandon the prospect and hope of a final re-integration of their divided interests into their proper Catholic unity.[27] They are good to the extent that they serve to open the way to a higher form of catholicity than that which they leave behind," but they are irreconcilable "with a true catholic sense of the proper unity and universality of the Church."[28] The denominations then must be sub-

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[25] Antichrist; or the Spirit of Sect and Schism (New York, 1848).

[26] Ibid., pp. 69, 71.

[27] Ibid.

[28] Ibid., p. 70.

ordinated to the sense of "church wholeness" and to the tendency toward "the great millennium, the 'church of the future,' in which our existing captivity shall come to an end."[29] But wholeness in the "church of the future" will not be the fruit of "counsel and compact" among sects or denominations--"all redemption from the power of the sect plague must begin with a revival of true and hearty faith, in the ancient article of one, holy, catholic church."[30] The power of Catholic ideas from the ancient Christian world needs to be incorporated, for these are not arbitrary or accidental but "form the necessary outbirth of a true church life."[31] Only with faith in the church did Nevin see hope for "restoration of our present captivity" and the "glorious one catholic church of the future, as the praise, and joy, and glory of the whole earth."[32]

It was impossible for the author of Antichrist to acquiesce in a denominational position as final and conclusive. No present condition could be considered identical with the ideal church toward which the actual church was in process of actualizing itself. The whole sect system is interimistic "and can be rightly endured only as it is regarded in this light," for whether one be Methodist, Presbyterian, or Lutheran, or whatever, if he courageously faces reality, he realizes his denomination

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[29] Ibid., p. 76.

[30] Ibid., p. 83.

[31] Ibid., p. 88.

[32] Ibid., p. 89.

is only part both numerically and constitutionally of the church--"a one-sided and defective manifestation of the Christian life."[33] The church by its constitution is one and not many; and fail as it may to actualize itself in this way, it can never renounce this as something false in any given stage of its history.[34] Its unity is based upon a common faith in a unique source of life. Both Reformed and Lutheran confessions stood upon common ground, "not a new faith extracted from the bible," but the old faith "purged from Roman corruptions."[35]

Faith in Protestantism, as Nevin understood the problem, was conditioned by the assumption that "the succession of the old church life still flows truly and vigorously in its veins."[36] What he called a "pseudo-Protestantism" tried to make the opposition between the time before the Reformation and the time after to be such that "any merit allowed to the first must be taken as an equivalent drawback on the worth of the second."[37] But to do this is to sell Protestantism short, to ignore its heritage, and to overlook its place in the evolution of Christianity. The glories of the church prior to the Reformation are not the exclusive heritage of the Roman Church, but part of the life flow into Protestantism. The

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[33]"The Sect System," MR 1 (1849), 537-38.

[34]"Puritanism and the Creed," MR 1 (1849), 591.

[35]Ibid., p. 596.

[36]"Modern Civilization," MR 3 (1851), 173.

[37]Ibid.

Reformation itself Nevin conceived of as an outcropping of the organic life flow in the church, "the organic outburst plainly of the life of Christianity."[38]

3. Process Produces Necessary Organs

The organic life of the church produces the organs, functions, creeds, confessions, and movements which are necessary for its evolution or actualizing of the ideal church. In the growth of the church, its moral guidelines and doctrinal confessions should reflect the incarnate quality of the church and mirror its life as an historical process. The church of the future will include the functions, confessions, and characteristics which respect the truly human in the process of history.

An example of this kind of production from the life of the church was, in Nevin's mind, the Heidelberg Catechism. His reflections upon its creation have implications beyond that immediate case. They have bearing upon the problem of whether the church is taken seriously as the historical and human bearer to the ages of the divine and super-historical. His reflections have implications as well for the problem of infallibility and human freedom in the church. No creed or confession, he reflected, could be genuine which did not have "this inwardly organic connection with the life it represents."[39] The life has to precede and

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[38]"The Classis of Mercersburg," MR 1 (1849), 386.

[39]"Zacharias Ursinus," MR 3 (1851), 500.

produce the symbol for its own use. The symbol may be written or uttered by a single mind but it must always be the "bearer of the general life in whose name it speaks." Otherwise the message would not be heard or felt as relative to the life of the body. He wrote:

> It must be the life of the church itself, embodied through some proper organ, in such form of speech as is at once recognized and responded to by the church at large as its own word. (Italics mine.)[40]

In an article written in 1850 in which he stated his difficulties with Orestes Brownson's concept of papal infallibility, Dr. Nevin had already applied some of the principles which he presented in his article on Ursinus and the Heidelberg Catechism just referred to. The theory of papal infallibility seemed to him to supersede and nullify human freedom which must be an intelligent and spontaneous response. In receiving infallible statements the human is overwhelmed as though by a foreign force.[41] The theory rested, he thought, on a "wrong conception of what authority is in the world of mind" and, so it followed, on a "wrong conception of the true nature of the church."[42] The true idea of authority in the moral world is that it should reveal itself "through the medium of the general life" of those who are subject and "in the way of history."[43]

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[40] Ibid.

[41] Nevin's ideas on human freedom are developed in the first of two essays in Human Freedom and a Plea for Philosophy (Mercersburg, Pa., 1850).

[42] "Brownson's Quarterly Review," MR 2 (1850), 60.

[43] Ibid., p. 61.

In Brownson's explanation the church was taken as infallible witness of God's mind, ecclesia docens, but in an abstract, purely outward way. However, "the gift is not mediated at all, in any way, by the life of the church as a whole."[44] In Brownson the ecclesia docens "is not an organic product and outbirth of the new creation," and her infallibility lies "on the outside of her proper presence in the world."[45]

With Nevin it was different. Because the church is the body of Christ, its incarnate nature is to be respected in its infallible functioning. In continuing revelation in the church, divinity is to have common life with humanity and is to reveal Christ "under a truly living and historical form."[46] Infallibility is "the life of Christ in his people, working out its own problems in a truly human way." It is the higher order revealing itself "through the very life and constitution of the lower, super-naturalizing it for its own ends."[47] The truth is in the church's life considered as a whole, and that is where it has to be sought.[48] There is safety in the mind of the Pope when he is in living communion with the universal church; infallibility is conditioned by "the working of the universal mind of the church" and it belongs thus to the process of

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[44] Ibid.

[45] Ibid.

[46] Ibid., p. 71.

[47] Ibid.

[48] Ibid., p. 73.

history.[49] The Pope is then the organ of truth for the church by mediating the church's life which reaches him "in a perfectly human and historical way."[50] For authority to be really from God it "must legitimate itself by entering the sphere of the life it seeks to rule." To do so it must take concrete form through a human activity in a social system like the church where authority "may have access to individual thought and will in conformity with the general law of our nature."[51]

An understanding of papal infallibility which took into consideration the general life of Christianity would not be out of the question in Nevin's understanding of the "church of the future."

> Let it appear that the decisions of the pope, though taken to be moved by the Holy Ghost, are the product in some way of the general life of Christianity, rationally working out the result through such a central organ according to the law of man's nature as otherwise known, and we can at least listen patiently to the plea that is put in for his infallibility.[52]

With respect to the papacy, the professor at Mercersburg taught his students that from a functional point of view the unity of the church supported the concept of the papacy. As an organization perhaps the best form of the church would be to have a visible center. At least it is not objectionable and certainly not, as some held, intrinsically anti-

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[49] Ibid.

[50] Ibid.

[51] "Brownson's Quarterly Review Again," MR 2 (1850), 321.

[52] Ibid.

christian. Though it isn't necessary any more than the episcopacy is, "it would perhaps be the best form of church government."[53] It appears that the "church of the future" would encompass some form of papacy, apparently a conciliarism.

4. Romanism as a Stage in the Historical Development of the Church

The Anglican crisis over the case of George Gorham and baptism, discussed in the last chapter, had occasioned the airing of Protestant opinions about the theology of the sacraments which caused Nevin great anguish over the condition of Protestantism. It was time to question the real meaning of its protest against Rome. Perhaps, as the opponents of sacraments claimed, the rupture with the pre-Reformation church and its sacramental tradition was meant to be complete eventually, although this may not have been the intention of the reformers themselves in the beginning. Perhaps the movement away from the ancient faith which Nevin observed was in the right direction. Perhaps the position of the Baptists concerning sacraments without objective efficacy was correct. But Nevin did not think so. He believed it was essential for Protestantism to retain from the ancient tradition an appreciation for an objective presence and power of Christ in the church which is made present in the sacraments. The churches of the Reformation should see themselves

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[53] W. H. Erb, ed. Dr. Nevin's Theology, Based on Manuscript Classroom Lectures (Reading, 1913), pp. 440-41.

growing out of that tradition as the promise of a better future for Christianity, as passing forward "to a new and higher position that shall be both Catholic and Protestant at the same time."[54] That will be a position which will combine the demands of the old Catholic faith with Protestant freedom.[55] Existing Protestantism had no answers to the questions Nevin was asking about its direction in the future. He, however, saw four alternatives for the future. The first meant rupture with the past and abandoning the sacramental system. The second involved despair with Protestantism and reconciliation with Rome. The third was the hope of a new dispensation with fresh apostolic commission and powers after the manner of Swedenborgianism.[56] A fourth and last resort, "the only one it seems to us which is left for the thoughtful" was the idea of historical development. In his article about the Gorham case, "The Anglican Crisis," he wrote:

> Without prejudice to Catholicism first in its own order and sphere, or to Protestantism next as a real advance on this in modern times, though with the acknowledgment of the faults and views of both systems, it is assumed that the whole present state of the Church is transitional only and interimistic; and that it is destined accordingly through the very crisis which is now coming on--not

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[54]"The Anglican Crisis," MR 3 (1851), 393.

[55]Ibid., p. 395.

[56]Emmanuel Swedenborg (1688-1772), Swedish scientist, theologian, and mystic. Several experiences convinced him he was a direct instrument of God; and, although he had no intention of founding a new sect, his followers organized the Church of New Jerusalem after his death. See G. Trobridge, Swedenborg: Life and Teaching, 4th ed. (New York, 1955).

> just by a new miracle setting aside the whole past as a dead failure, but in the way of true historical progress, which makes the past always the real womb both of the present and the future--to surmount in due season the painful contradictions . . . of the Protestant controversy as this now stands, and so to carry it triumphantly forward to its own last sense, (the type neither of St. Peter nor of St. Paul but of both rather as brought together by St. John,) in some form that shall be found at the same time to etherealize and save, in the same way, the last sense also and rich wealth of the old Catholic faith. (Italics mine.)[57]

In 1851 Nevin began a three-part series in the Mercersburg Review entitled "Early Christianity" which further revealed the concern for the status of Protestantism of which he had written in "The Anglican Crisis." It expressed alarm over the abandonment of her tradition and rupture with the life source which had produced so much that is good and holy in the Roman Church. His sympathetic treatment of the latter and his negative attitude toward Protestantism brought further charges of "Romanizing" from his opponents within the German Reformed Church and expression of concern from his sympathizers. It was an admirer who wrote in objection to the series on early Christianity that "Nevin lives in his ideal church which is not yet."[58]

It is true that Nevin showed impatience with crude misstatements of Roman positions and that in rectifying this he revealed an uncommon sympathy with Roman Catholicism. He criticized misconceptions about

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[57]"The Anglican Crisis," p. 396. In "Early Christianity," Article Three, MR 4 (1852), 49, Nevin develops three ways in which this higher stage may evolve.

[58]An unsigned article, "Literary Notes," written presumably by the Editor in WM, September 17, 1851.

the holiness to which Romanism had given birth as though this were in no sense "the proper product of the Catholic religion."[59] He had a special place in his heart for the "lovely religion" he recognized in Pascal, Fenelon, the Sisters of Charity, Charles Borromeo, and Philip Neri. The fact is, he felt, that such holiness was the product of a life which was the heritage of Protestantism as well as Romanism. Defense of Protestantism which skipped such tradition in order to rest on "pure repristination" of a golden age was insufficient and unsound.[60]

Whatever differences there were between the beginning and later centuries, Nevin's investigation led him to conclude that "the course of things was from the very start towards that order at least which afterwards prevailed" in Roman Catholicism.[61] Two conclusions important for the church of the future follow from this: first, that there is an historical connection with the life that has gone before; and secondly, that Protestantism as an advanced period in the historical movement holds a vital relation to the first period only through the Roman Catholic phase. In this way, as in all growth, the possibility and even necessity of a transition on the part of the church through stages and forms is assumed.[62] Even the papacy is explainable in that growth process, for

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[59]"Early Christianity," MR 3 (1851), 474.

[60]Ibid., pp. 477-78, 481.

[61]Ibid., p. 481.

[62]Ibid.

the whole system was carried at least towards the papacy with intrinsic necessity from the beginning. The papacy was a flowering of the organic life of Christianity with "a mission to fulfill in the service of Christianity that could not have been fulfilled as well in any other way." It was the bulwark of true religion in the middle ages without which the church "would have fallen to pieces hundreds of years before the Reformation."[63]

Protestantism, "the favorite child of Catholicism," is not itself the full realization of Christianity, but "a process of transition only towards a higher and better state of the church."[64] In it both Protestantism and Catholicism united shall reveal the full sense of Christianity "in a form now absolute and complete."[65] In this way Nevin believed that an understanding of the church in historical development allowed for a favorable view of Catholicism. With respect to the past, it can be seen as a preserver of the life which gave birth to Protestantism; and with respect to the future, it is a bearer of life which can complement what is lacking in Christianity stemming from the Reformation. Seeing the Church as an historical development likewise allows Protestantism to understand its transitoriness whose breaking up is to make room for a more perfect state of the church.[66] For that to come about the help of Romanism is

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[63] Ibid., Second Article, p. 560.

[64] "Early Christianity," Third Article, p. 37.

[65] Ibid., p. 38.

[66] Ibid., p. 48.

needed. It has certain principles and forms of life which are lacking in Protestantism and are needed as a "counter-balance." How this shall come about is cloaked in mystery, but the author of the articles entitled "Early Christianity" suggested three ways.

> First, Protestantism may be taken for the grand reigning stream of Christianity (though not the whole of it by any means) into which finally the life of Catholicism is to pour itself as a wholesome qualifying power yielding to it the palm of superior right and strength.
>
> Or secondly, the two forces may be viewed as contrary sides merely of a dialectic process, in the Hegelian sense, which must be both alike taken up and so brought to an end . . . in a new form of existence, that shall be at once the truth of both and yet something far higher and better than either.
>
> Or lastly, it may be supposed that the principal succession of the proper church life lies after all in the channel of the Roman Catholic communion; while Protestantism is to be regarded still as a true outflow of the same, legitimate and necessary in its time, which however must in the end fall back into the old Catholic stream in order to fulfil its own mission, bringing into the universal church thus a new spiritual tone which only such a crisis could enable it to reach.[67]

Any of the three, he concluded, would vindicate Protestantism in the scheme of historical development, even the last one which implies the necessity of Protestantism's presence and the reality of its vocation "as a vast and mighty factor in the work by which the church is to be made finally complete."[68]

The theme of "Early Christianity" raised clouds of protest within his own church, even among his supporters. The editor of the Weekly

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[67] Ibid., p. 49.

[68] Ibid.

Messenger had come under criticism in the past for partiality toward Nevin and Schaff. Apparently the three-part series in the Mercersburg Review assaulting Protestantism was the ultimate point of tolerance for him, and in an editorial dated September 15, 1851, the year the articles had appeared, Editor Schneck protested the tendency of theology at Mercersburg. He asserted the support of a high percentage of the ministry in that opinion. There was, likewise, considerable response in the periodicals of other churches. In addition to the standard opposition of the Lutheran Observer and the Dutch Christian Intelligencer, the Congregationalist Puritan Recorder noted the series with dismay and at the end of a critical article supposed that Nevin would convert to Roman Catholicism taking many with him.

Nevin's Cyprian studies corroborated his findings in "Early Christianity" regarding the Catholic direction of the Cyprianic Church and the need for resorting to a theory of historical development for vindication of the Reformation. He expressed less confidence in a solution to the problem than he had in the earlier series. He had no "precise construction" for a solution. That was no part of his plan in writing on Cyprian, wanting as he did to avoid the charge of theorizing. His only concern was the facts of history.

> If we even had a theory in our thoughts that might be perfectly satisfactory to our own mind, we would not choose to bring it forward in the present connection; lest it might seem that the subject was identified in some way, with any such scheme of explanation. What we have wished, is to present the subject in its own separate and naked form, not entangled with any theory;

> that it may speak for itself; that it may provoke thought; that it may lead to some earnest and honest contemplation of the truth for its own sake. . . . Our concern has been simply to give a true picture of facts. The difficulty of the whole subject is of course clearly before our mind. We feel it deeply, and not without anxiety and alarm. But we are not bound to solve it and have no more interest in doing so than others.[69]

5. Nevin's Anguish over Protestantism Settled in Terms of Historical Development

By 1852 Nevin manifested clear disenchantment with the position of Protestantism and sympathy toward the Roman Church. "It is plain enough indeed," he wrote in that year, "that my sympathies have grown to be very strong towards Catholicism," concerning which "a great revolution has taken place in my mind."[70] For more than a year, since writing "The Anglican Crisis," almost all his theological effort was devoted to studying ancient Christianity. History revealed the tendency, from its earliest evidence, towards offices and functions in the church which one could only associate with Roman Catholicism. In September, 1850 Nevin had requested the seminary board to accept his resignation at the end of the 1851 term. His stated reasons were that "for a long time past my salary has not been paid" as well as the fact that obligations at the college, of which he was President and in which he was temporary

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[69]"Cyprian," Fourth Article, MR 4 (1852), 562-63.

[70]June 9, 1852 letter to Alphonsus McMaster, editor of the Catholic New York Freeman's Journal. Brownson Archives, Notre Dame University.

instructor in mathematics, demanded his time.[71] But much more than those factors were at work in his decision as we shall see subsequently.

The Synod at Lancaster in November, 1851, acting upon Dr. Nevin's request refused to accept his resignation and asked him to withdraw it. By the time the Synod had convened many in the church wished his resignation. The issue had become freighted with the concern of some segments about his orthodoxy. For the Synod to accept his resignation, even though requested by him, would appear to be a victory for his opponents and would be tantamount to impugning his orthodoxy. The Synod's ploy, asking him to withdraw his request, was a political move to circumvent its support of either the pro- or anti-Mercersburg Theology parties.[72] Instead they asked him to reconsider. On Christmas Day, 1851 he resigned as seminary professor without implicating the Synod through an official action.[73] The Synod later qualified the meaning of its delay action in requesting that Nevin withdraw his request for resignation. They indicated that the totality of opinions expressed by the Mercersburg professors was not by implication approved, but as Nevin himself wrote in 1854 about the Synod action, they sanctioned "the reigning drift" of the teaching.[74]

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[71] In H. M. J. Klein, History of the Eastern Synod of the Reformed Church in the United States (Lancaster, 1943), p. 217.

[72] Ibid., p. 219.

[73] December 25, 1851 letter to Moses Kieffer, President of the Synod. Reprinted in WM, December 31, 1851.

[74] "The Dutch Crusade," MR 6 (1854), 69, 73.

By 1853 Nevin had resigned as professor of theology, chairman of the liturgy committee, chief contributor to the Mercersburg Review, and president of Marshall College. He sheds some light on his action in a letter to the editor of the Catholic New York Freeman's Journal, Alphonsus McMaster. To retain his seminary chair implied some "theological obligation"; and although the presidency of Marshall College was not directly an ecclesiastical charge, it too implied "some restraining force" of which he wished to be relieved so that he might be able "to deal with this great Catholic question as independently as possible of outward restraints."[75] His friend, Philip Schaff, referred to Nevin's difficulty in a letter to a German correspondent written the previous year in which he associated it with "a conscientious doubt whether he was just the man suited to direct the theological youth for service in a Protestant denomination, while in his own mind the whole church question was undergoing radical revision."[76] Nevin was, as he wrote to Orestes Brownson in 1852, in a "state of perplexity and doubt which I am not prepared yet to bring to an end."[77] A fellow professor recalls that he was dissatisfied

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[75]February 26, 1853, Brownson Archives, Notre Dame University Library. Available in microfilm at the Library of the Lancaster Theological Seminary.

[76]Philip Schaff to Professor Ebrard quoted in The Christian Intelligencer, December 16, 1852. Cited in Nichols, Romanticism in American Theology, p. 195.

[77]August 18, 1852, Brownson Archives, Notre Dame University Library. Available in microfilm at the Library of the Lancaster Theological Seminary.

with both Protestantism and Catholicism and adds physical weakness to the description of his condition during this period of retirement and reflection.[78]

There was considerable interest in Roman Catholic circles regarding the turn of events at Mercersburg. Some Catholic newspapers asked for prayers for his conversion. Brownson and McMasters, both converts, wrote personally, as did Archbishop Hughes of New York. In response to Brownson he confessed the difficulties his Protestant mind had in accepting Catholic positions. Among these he cited the role of Mary. He greatly respected the Virgin but he found the exaggerations by Alphonsus Ligouri concerning the necessity of Mary rather confounding. Why isn't this reflected in Cyprian and the Fathers of the second century?

By late 1853 Dr. Nevin had apparently settled the church question satisfactorily. In the January, 1854 issue of the Mercersburg Review he wrote vigorously as a representative of the German Reformed Church against charges of Romanizing and in defense of freedom within the church regarding theology. "The Dutch Crusade" was a fifty-one page article by the "retired" professor. The "crusade" was the "impertinent intervention" in 1852-53 by the Dutch Christian Intelligencer and other "outlaws of the so-called religious press" against the Mercersburg Theology and the German Reformed Church.

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[78]Theodore Appel, Life and Works of John Williamson Nevin (Philadelphia, 1889), pp. 439, 723.

The church, he wrote, neither condemned nor totally embraced Mercersburg Theology, and it certainly did not impose it.[79] Romanizing, at any rate, was a relative term. To be for the creed and opposed to anti-popery was not to be for Romanism. The real question raised by theology at Mercersburg was whether Christianity was still essentially what it had been in its primitive period without radical departure from a common faith in the creed.[80] He defended his series called "Early Christianity." Its purpose was two-fold: first, presentation of historical facts, and secondly, demonstration of the necessity of openly professing a Protestantism in harmony with these facts.[81] The alternatives open to Protestantism are either to ignore the facts or to accept them and an implicit growth process. Only the latter avoids treason to Christianity. To say that Protestantism is not the continuation substantially of the primitive church, though changed in form, "is at once to pronounce it anti-christian and false."[82]

The adherence of the German Reformed Church to early Christianity about which he wrote in "The Dutch Crusade" was the expression of a full Protestant consciousness. If some might be led from the Christianity

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[79] "The Dutch Crusade," MR 6 (1854).

[80] Ibid., p. 92.

[81] Ibid., p. 108.

[82] Ibid., p. 111.

they learn in the German Reformed Church into the Roman Church, it would not be as a logical outflow of the system. It would mean "giving up" the position of the German Reformed Church as well as Mercersburg Theology. The faith of that church and that theology is not Roman Catholic. As a denomination the German Reformed Church is committed to showing that Protestantism seeks after the "full actualization" of the attributes of the church. In this she follows "what she takes to be the truth in a different and more excellent way."[83]

Nevin had apparently settled for himself the correctness of his own denomination within the historical development of Christianity. From his point of view the German Reformed Church appeared in harmony with the facts of history. Romanizing tendencies were really the Protestant heritage recovered. A law of growth was at work in Christianity. Development allowed differences in outward forms from primitive Christian life. If Nevin, as a result of his time of reflection from 1852-1853, had reason to doubt that the organic life of the Church would continue to evolve toward an advanced state of Christianity in the future, he gave no indication of it in his first article following the retreat. He simply defended positions which had led him previously to the concept of an advanced state for the church of the future in which divergent streams would complement each other's weakness in a new and vigorous whole, the "holy, catholic church" of the apostles' creed.

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[83] Ibid., pp. 117, 112, 115.

6. A True Ministry

Within a year of his "The Dutch Crusade" Nevin preached in November, 1854 at the installation of his successor as professor of theology at the seminary, Bernard Wolff.[84] His sermon is a significant contribution to understanding his thought at an important period in his life. It was delivered at a formal church function just after he had settled the church question in favor of his German Reformed allegiance. He preached as a Protestant in the reformed tradition, and yet his understanding of the ministry is quite unreformed. The concept of the ministry as an integral part of the church's life must link itself with the ancient tradition, in this case by apostolic succession. His concept challenged the popular understanding of the universal priesthood and the role of the ministry.

Nevin's renewed interest in the ministry came at a time when ministers themselves were eager to minimize their distinction from the laity. Clerical dress had disappeared and emphasis was placed upon preaching and a free liturgy rather than anything resembling the priestly, altar liturgy. This de-emphasis of the office was accompanied by a lessening of concern about induction into the order. In this connection congregations often selected ministers without regard to the existent ministry as an order within the large church.

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[84]"The Christian Ministry," MR 7 (1855).

In contrast Nevin brought to Mercersburg from his Pittsburgh period a sympathy for the seventeenth century Presbyterian understanding of ministerial succession, that power passes from Christ to the apostles to church officials. Only those receiving it in this way can transmit it to ministers through ordination which confers a power not possessed without it. He seems to have retained a preference for a kind of presbyterianism. In his classroom lectures he told his students that the episcopacy was indeed a natural growth in the second century, one which met the needs of the church for a long time. Presbyterianism was a variation upon episcopacy, a growth in developing Christianity to meet a new situation of the sixteenth century. It is community of life which is primary in ministerial succession, not the form of its transmission. As he wrote in 1852, deep in his "Romanizing" period, "it is quite possible to conceive of an identity of life under great variations of outward form, while it may be wanting entirely where the outward show of variation is the least."[85] He reminded those who heard him lecture that "there are facts in the New Testament which cannot be made to harmonize with any system of church government in vogue since the days of the Apostles."[86] Neither papalism, episcopacy, nor presbyterianism is derived "directly and unmistakably from Jesus Christ or the apostles, although each can

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[85]"Cyprian," Third Article, MR 4 (1852), 419.

[86]Erb, op. cit., pp. 446-48.

find some biblical support." The high appreciation of the ministry which he brought from Pittsburgh was refined and deepened over the years at Mercersburg. It was a necessary organ with divine commission and authority.

In an 1849 article on the ministry referred to in an earlier chapter, Nevin had written that Christ's life given to the church is to be exercised "from its life as a whole," through organs created for this purpose. There is succession in the Protestant ministry, he wrote then, because there is succession of Christ's life in Protestantism. And with life, there is creation of the needed organs for exercising it. It is not "outward succession" of the ministry "nakedly and separately considered" which makes the ministry a valid organ, but its connection with "a true historical succession in the life of the church."[87] The life of the church alone "can fully legitimate and clothe with power the needful organs of this life," and thus succession of the ministry "lay in the life of the church as a whole."[88]

The church is a wider conception than the ministry but "so joined together that the one cannot be severed from the other." But the connection between them had been clarified by Nevin over the course of five years. Whereas in 1849 the ministry was conceived as depending

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[87]"The Classis of Mercersburg," MR 1 (1849), 385.

[88]Ibid.

upon the life in the Church as a whole, in 1854 he said in effect that the church is preceded in rank by the ministry. The church was constituted by the commission of Christ that created the ministry as mediator of its life. The mediating role of the ministry continues in the church in such a way that it is not conceived of as the creation of the church. The terms of the commission show the church starting in the apostles and built upon Peter as the central representative of the college of the apostles.[89] The ministry is "the great agency which Christ is pleased to employ for the edification of his mystical body" in accordance with the text upon which his sermon for the installation of his successor at the seminary, Bernard Wolff, was based, Ephesians 4:8-16.

The ministry as an organ of the church may, as before, be considered the flowering of the church's life creating what is necessary for its continuance, but the functional order is clarified in the 1854 sermon. The life which is in Christ the head creates the descending order which ministers life to the body: from Christ to the body through the ministry.

> To say that there may be a church without a bishop in such view, a purely republican assembly of Christians in simply lay capacity able to generate and produce from itself a full, valid ministration of the mystery of grace contained in the gospel, without the intervention in any way of the ministry constituted and commissioned for the purpose by the ascended Saviour himself; to say, in other words, that the church is before the ministry in the order of existence and in no way dependent upon it, but complete without it . . . is a heresy which at once strikes at the root of all faith

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[89]"The Christian Ministry," MR 7 (1855), 79.

> in the supernatural constitution of the church and turns both the apostolical commission and the gift of Pentecost into a solemn farce. (Italics mine.)[90]

The commission given to the apostles implies concerted or collegiate action. It was not a power which each of them was left to himself to exercise in his own way. Rather, "they were bound by it to the real and fixed constitution of grace with which it was concerned in the capacity of a college or corporation."[91] No matter how the ministers might be multiplied or the forms of their ministerial office vary, "the office itself could be of force only as it retained always the character of a single body bound together, and in union with itself."[92] Its unity and intended perpetuity demand succession, "and the succession, to be valid, must be kept up in some way within the bosom of the institution itself."[93] The ministry is derived from the commission of Christ, and can be maintained through the ages "only as it may have power to transmit the actual virtue of this first supernatural appointment from one generation still onward to another."[94]

A true ministry must be able to refer itself to the one commission of Christ, and be comprehended within the one church which is the object

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[90] Ibid., p. 80.

[91] Ibid., p. 81.

[92] Ibid.

[93] Ibid., p. 82.

[94] Ibid.

of faith in the apostles' creed. It follows that a true ministry must submit itself to the order embodied in the commission and the church.

> To act officially in any polity, the single functionary must not only join himself with its general organization, but in doing so must bow also to the authority which already belongs to it as an actually existing constitution in its own sphere . . . Christianity in its very nature involves the idea of authority, under a form not dependent on human thought or will; so that here above all, the conception of office must be taken to imply, at the same time, submission to the actual polity or order from which it springs regarded as a living permanent constitution. And if this polity be represented by the unity of the ministry, as we have seen it to be, there must be a line of historical continuance by which both together shall be found falling back to the great commission in which the church originally took its start. (Italics mine.)[95]

While it appears that Nevin's concern is with institutional succession and a political unity, rather than with unity of apostolic faith, it is likely that he intended a relation to exist between them.

The concern for relating the ministry to the one commission of Christ which established the church recalls Nevin's insistence upon founding the primary expression of faith, the apostles' creed, upon the statement of Peter's faith which preceded the commission. The church of the creed is the church with its descending order, both growing out of the same moment of faith and commission. The faith of the creed is associated with the ministerial office, and submission to the polity or order implied in the office is submission to the faith of the church of the creed. For this reason the ministry is the sign of unity in faith.

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[95] Ibid., pp. 88-90.

The question of the ministry is concerned "not merely with the accidental form of Christianity, but with its inmost constitution and life."[96] Therefore every minister is bound to assure himself that he is a minister of the true church of the creed stemming from the one commission of Christ, and every Christian is likewise obliged to satisfy himself that he is under the guidance of a legitimate and true ministry. A ministry has those qualities, it seems, when it subjects itself to the authority of the faith of the church embodied in the creed which reflects the life to be mediated by the ministerial college in the commission of Christ.

7. Historical Christianity and Church Union

By 1857 Nevin was again fully engaged in church life, renewing his pleas for an ecclesiology based upon the creed.[97] But he published nothing significant on the church and its evolution toward union in a higher state until 1868. The Review had suspended publication during the war years, 1861-1866, but with its resumption Nevin was again a frequent contributor. In 1868 he published an article concerning the 1867 Presbyterian Union Convention in Philadelphia.[98] In it his basic conviction of long standing concerning the basis for union through adherence to the early creeds was again expressed. His opinion had not changed over

[96] Ibid., p. 93.

[97] "Hodge on the Ephesians" appeared in 1857 and "Thoughts on the Church" was published in two articles in 1858.

[98] "Presbyterian Union Convention," MR 15 (1868).

more than twenty years. He was willing "to stand with all parties on the basis of the old creeds," he wrote to Philip Schaff in 1867, "but God helping me, nowhere else."[99] What the Christian spirit yearns for, he wrote in the article about the Presbyterian Convention, is "organic oneness, as the only proper form of Christ's body."[100] No outward alliance can substitute for that. A sense for the proper "wholeness" of the church must go before concern for the interests of sects. Nevin was sensitive to the denominational confessions but these, he felt, had to be subject to interest in "the wholeness of the Christian faith and life." When this is done, when the part is subject to the whole, then Christian confessions may assert their differences without damaging the whole--"their polemics become in fact irenics, antithesis with a view to ultimate synthesis."[101] No church union can ever be reached without a basis in the old creeds; it followed that any "effectual movement" toward union is conditioned necessarily by a renewal of interest in these.[102] In this connection, he wrote to Philip Schaff wishing him well in his work for union in the Evangelical Alliance conference eventually

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[99]December 7, 1867, Library of the Historical Society of the Evangelical and Reformed Church, Franklin and Marshall College.

[100]"Presbyterian Union Convention," MR 15 (1868), 91-92.

[101]Ibid., p. 102.

[102]Ibid., p. 109.

held in 1873 but indicating that he had no "faith in it as a surrogate for the true idea of the church" and that for this reason he had no wish "to be invited specially to any participation in its proceedings."[103]

Equally, church union could not be based upon a repristination of the Reformation period "as though all right thought on every point began then and became all at once complete then, in such sort as to admit no possible progress through all following time." In this spirit not even Lutheran and Reformed communions could hope for union. Nevin, when he spoke of church union, intended neither giving up the Reformation and its principles nor starting with it so blindly that historical Christianity was avoided. He tried to achieve "a free inward conjunction" of the two. This implied that Protestantism did not comprehend in itself all that was included in early Christianity and needed complementing. Much that was left behind in the Greek and Latin communions needed still to be taken up into Protestantism.[104]

8. Church Union after the First Vatican Council

Nevin was deeply disturbed by the decree on infallibility. In an article written in 1873 concerning the old Catholics he recalled the sense of uneasiness which had gripped the Catholic world outside of the Italian peninsula at the approach of the First Vatican Council, dreading what

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[103]April 27, 1870, Library of Historical Society, Franklin and Marshall College.

[104]"Answer to Professor Dorner," MR 15 (1868), 621.

might happen.[105] In recalling the anxiety of Cardinal Newman, "the most thoroughly learned man in Catholic England," he was reflecting his own mind. He referred to a letter of Newman's published prior to the council in which he anticipated the difficulty he would have in defending decisions "hard to maintain in the face of historical facts." Nevin's article recorded too his shock at the "ecclesiastical hari-kari" committed by the German bishops afterwards to give to the Vatican Council decree "a character of ex-post-facto-ecumenicity which all the world knows never belonged to it in fact."[106]

The ecumenically-minded Nevin had shown an openness toward infallibility conceived of as a reflection of the life of the church, but the decree, it seemed to him, made infallibility an autocratic function remote from the church's life. He looked upon it as an obstacle to unity, another instance of the papal church's contribution to division. He judged papalism the cause of the East-West division and its resistance to reform "literally forced into existence that great Protestant secession which has been the source of such endless division since." Since then it had shown an intolerance of union except under the one condition "of blind submission to a mere human autocracy, which contradicts the idea of Christianity." The decree on infallibility had, in his view, driven the

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[105]"The Old Catholic Movement," MR 20 (1873).

[106]Ibid., pp. 242-43.

Christian world to the wall and turned into "derision" the thought of Christian union. For her there is no possibility for union except "that of an artificial mechanical uniformity."[107]

Nevin saw hope in the kind of union proposed by Dr. I. von Döllinger's Old Catholic movement. It was not based upon an imposed confessional uniformity, and it maintained that national peculiarities have their rights and are not to be suppressed. Freedom is the law. Union should be historical, based upon the bible and the ecumenical creeds, "yet not so as to ignore the onward flow of the true Christian life in later times."[108] True church union has to be catholic in its end. From the beginning the true spirit of union seeks re-integration of the divided church "in its wholeness, and not any alliance simply of kindred fractions of the church which may only serve after all to strengthen the main walls of division."[109] This kind of union does not exclude differences based on nationality. In fact, such collective national churches are essential to the conception of catholic unity. This is so because nations are "original and necessary diversifications of our general human life," the completion of which is the church. Nevin recorded Döllinger's conclusion that national difference should be conserved as necessary component parts of that life.

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[107] Ibid., p. 287.

[108] Ibid., p. 290.

[109] Ibid., p. 291.

> Such being the case it would seem indeed to follow that the cause of Christian union, as things now are, to be at all effectual must aim first of all in any case at a national church wholeness or catholicity as the only way of reaching catholicity at last in its full oecumenical form.[110]

He made no attempt to predict what would come of the ideal of Döllinger or to criticize it, but it is clear from his article that his sympathy was with the Old Catholic movement. If divisions in the church in Germany could be healed in that way and the ancient Catholic faith could be joined with what is "right and good" in Protestantism, "it would go farther toward a resolution of the great question of the age than any other movement yet attempted or proposed for the purpose." It would be of infinitely more value than any pan-denominationalism under several banners without regard to nationality. It would be of more account also than all leagues or alliances "that have no higher idea of Christian union than that of a pacification of sects."[111]

The decree on papal infallibility had violated a principle of Nevin's ecclesiology that the church as an organism gives birth out of its vitality to the organs and functions needed for its well being and growth. The decree on papal infallibility had been imposed upon the council, he thought, where there was not the moral unanimity within the church to indicate that the body needed the function at least as it was expressed by

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[110] Ibid.

[111] Ibid., p. 292.

the council. Nevin referred to this ecclesiological principle again in 1874 in reviewing the book of the Episcopalian, Bishop A. Cleveland Coxe, on episcopacy. If either episcopacy or papacy are necessary for the church they must be in some way "a true concretion or outbirth from the inward life of the church."[112] The cure for division in Christendom is not found in an outward order provided by an episcopacy nor from any "one confessional scheme of doctrine now known in the world." Christianity is living and cannot be imprisoned in any "logical sarcophagus" of this sort.[113] Healing of divisions will come when Christianity incorporates what is good from all past ages with flexibility. It will involve a concern primarily for the wholeness of the church's life derived from her traditional sources while incorporating denominational reflections and emphases of that life.

> Christianity, to be truly historical, must revert again--not just to the period of the Reformation, not to the Nicene period . . . but back to the very fountain-head itself, so as to descend from this afresh . . . down to our modern time, freighted with a depth and wealth of meaning, such as is not to be met with either in any one age, or even in all ages together, going before.[114]

9. Summary

This chapter has examined John Nevin's vision of the church in its final stage in which the divergent streams of Protestant and Catholic

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[112]"Apollos: Or the Way of God," MR 21 (1874), 25.

[113]Ibid., p. 34.

[114]Ibid., p. 36.

Christianity shall have merged and complemented each other in a unity based upon the ancient creeds. The unity which he envisioned allowed for no denominational difference but tolerated denominations as an interim phase. Nevin did not rule out all differences as his treatment of the Old Catholic movement reveals. There he approved of the distinctions which culture might impose upon national churches.

The actual church was seen pressing on toward fulfillment, evolving through corruptions, through new forms and stages, to its "higher state in the future." Both Protestant and Catholic Christianity must be considered as stages in the church's evolution. To absolutize a stage in the development was intolerable, and for this reason the sect mentality which looks upon its own denomination as final was severely criticized by Nevin.

In the process toward the "church of the future," the organic life of the church gives rise to those forms and functions which are necessary for its fulfillment. In this connection, Nevin was open to a role for the papacy in the future as he had been toward what he considered its necessary role in the past in preserving the faith in the medieval church. Even after his disappointment with the First Vatican Council, he did not close his mind to its possibility, provided it could be shown to be "the outbirth from the inward life of the Church." In the same way he had revealed a sympathy for papal infallibility in its relation to the life of the church.

Sensitivity to the organic life of the church stemming from Christ through historical Christianity was the cause of his anguish over the state of Protestantism. By fostering a sect mentality, Protestantism, he feared, had severed its link with the life of the church which comes from adherence to the ancient faith. The only solution for Protestantism was to accept itself as interimistic and to recognize a theory of historical development which put it in contact with its heritage and opened the way for a higher stage. He was satisfied that his own German Reformed Church through its ministry was mediator of life from the one commission of Christ which constituted the one, holy, catholic church of the apostles' creed. The church of the future would have to adhere to that faith as the unique source of unity.

CHAPTER VI

A ROMAN CATHOLIC EVALUATION OF JOHN NEVIN'S ECCLESIOLOGY

Our century has often been referred to as the century of the church. The official work of both Roman Catholic and Protestant churches in the twentieth century reveals a growing interest in the ecclesial theme. The Faith and Order Movement and the World Council of Churches have been studying the nature and structure of the church, and within the Catholic church these same concerns have been given prominence in official pronouncements. The hastily concluded First Vatican Council with its emphasis on the papacy had left an unbalanced picture of a monarchical church which required rectifying. Pius XII's encyclical, Mystici Corporis, in 1943, dealing with the mysterious vital relationship of all members of the church to Christ and the Holy Spirit, was a step in that direction. But many questions regarding the nature and structure of the church remained unanswered in 1959 when Pope John announced an ecumenical council. It is not surprising, therefore, that the major theme of the Second Vatican Council, reflecting a state of widespread theological concern, was the church.[1]

[1]See the remarks by Avery Dulles in The Documents of Vatican II, Walter Abbot, ed. (New York, 1966), pp. 9-13. For a general treatment

The Second Vatican Council revealed a broad agreement between a Roman Catholic understanding of the church of Christ and that of other Christian churches. Even in those areas where disagreement remains, the possibility for understanding and growth toward concord has been given wider scope. Because of this ecumenical latitude John Nevin's concept of the church, developed within the Reformed tradition and yet so sympathetic to the Roman Catholic position, may enlighten our common search for a deeper appreciation of the church of Christ.

John Nevin is helpful in this search because he remained in communion with the German Reformed Church even after a period of retirement from

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of the theology of the church, see Lexikon für Theologie und Kirche, 3:781-787 and 6:167-186; Dictionnaire de Theologie Catholique, Tables generales 1:1110-30; and The New Catholic Encyclopedia, 3:678-693. A standard pre-conciliar study of the church is Charles Journet, The Church of the Word Incarnate, 2 vols. (London; New York, 1955). A contrasting contemporary study is Hans Küng, The Church (New York, 1967); and see also his pre-requisite volume, Structures of the Church (New York, 1964). Other significant works are: Karl Rahner, The Church and the Sacraments (New York, 1963); Edward Schillebeeckx, Christ the Sacrament of the Encounter with God (New York, 1963); Otto Semmelroth, Church and Sacrament (Notre Dame, Indiana, 1965); Jerome Hamer, The Church is a Communion (New York, 1964); and Yves M. J. Congar, The Mystery of the Temple (Westminster, Md., 1964) and The Mystery of the Church (Baltimore, 1965). Two popular books with select bibliography are Frank B. Norris, God's Own People (Baltimore, 1962) and Andre de Bovis, What is the Church? (New York, 1961). For postconciliar reflection consult: L'Eglise comme Mystere. L'Eglise de Vatican II, T. Strotmann, ed. (Paris, 1966) with articles by Journet, Smulders, K. Rahner, Semmelroth, Martelet, and others; also, Vatican II: An Interfaith Appraisal, John H. Miller, ed. (Notre Dame, Indiana, 1966) with articles by Philips, de Lubac, Congar, Baum, and others. Concilium, vols. 1 and 4 (New York, 1964, 1965) contain important studies. A small but reflective book is Avery Dulles, The Dimension of the Church; A postconciliar Reflection (Westminster, Md., 1967). For reflections on the tasks facing the church after Vatican II, see Karl Rahner, The Church After the Council (New York, 1966).

church affairs to consider the Catholic question. He evidently assured himself of the correctness of his position that Protestantism was an inspired corrective movement in the church, necessary for preserving and highlighting values which might otherwise have ossified. Yet he was not unaware of the defects of Protestantism. From his vantage point as a convinced Protestant and a serious student of Catholicism he concluded that each of these was an incomplete actualization of the church of Christ. Each was able to complement the other, he felt, in the movement toward the full realization of the church of Christ.

The degree to which Catholics have moved toward emphases expressed by Nevin is further indication of the importance of continued critical discussion of the theologians of other churches. They reflect upon the sources of Christianity from a point of view enriched by values often neglected in the Catholic church. Openness by Catholics to the results of their work is a step toward unity which John Nevin suggested would be accomplished by mutual complementarity. Previous chapters have presented the fruit of Nevin's reflections upon the sources as they affect the concept of the church. This chapter is an evaluation and appreciation of his understanding of the church from the point of view of Vatican II and contemporary Catholic theological development.

1. The Church as an Organic Community of Life in Christ

Its meaning. --The Dogmatic Constitution on the Church and the writings of John Nevin describe the church in similar terms as the

mediator of the mystery of salvation in Christ (CC 1-8 and N. II).[2] From the beginning the Constitution adopts a Christocentric perspective which is threaded throughout the document. Unlike the description of the so-called post-tridentine, counter-reformation theology, Lumen Gentium does not describe the church in terms which emphasize the visible, structured church or depict it in the political language of a "perfect society." It emphasizes, as Bellarmine's widely used definition did not, the Pauline and Johannine life images.[3] The Constitution on the Church begins, as Nevin did, with the affirmation of a fact, the mystery of God's plan of salvation in Christ as the basis of life in the church (CC 3, 4, 5, 8 and N. II.A). In the visible church the mystery is veiled and appears as a complex whole which is described in paired concepts (CC 8). The church is hierarchical society/mystical body; visible assembly/spiritual community;

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[2]The popular English titles of decrees and constitutions are the basis for abbreviations used in citing; but in text, for the sake of variety, the Latin title of the Constitution on the church is used frequently. In citing, CC is the Constitution on the Church; DE is the Decree on Ecumenism; CL, the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy; and MW, the Church in the Modern World. N, for Nevin, refers to this dissertation; in citing, N. II. A. 1 would mean Chapter Two, Part A, Section 1 of this study.

[3]Bellarmine's definition is found in De Controversiis Christianae fidei adversus nostri temporis haereticos, Vol. II, liber III, caput II: "There is only one church, not two, and this one true church is a community of men brought together by profession of the true faith and communion in the same sacraments, and under the administration of recognized pastors and especially of the sole vicar of Christ on earth, the Roman Pontiff." Cited in Jerome Hamer, The Church is a Communion (New York, 1964).

and earthly church/church enriched by heavenly things. It is composed of human and divine elements in an organic structure in which the elements are interiorly linked. It can therefore be compared to the mystery of the incarnation (CC 8 and N. II. A. 2; II. B. 1; III. A. 2). As continuation of the redemptive incarnation and as the mediator of union with God (CC 1, 3, 8 and N. III. A. 1) it is the historical church of the apostles' creed (CC 8 and N. II. B. 3) and the object of our faith (CC 5 and N. II. B. 1; III. A. 2).

The distinction which Nevin drew between the ideal and the actual church casts light on the meaning of the church as a process toward fulfillment in the life of the mystery (N. II. A. 2). The ideal church is the power of a new creation in Christ introduced into the actual history of the world. He is the mystery, the fullness of the new life which is to be shared with all of humanity. The perfection of unity, holiness, and catholicity is in him and potentially in the actual church through his shared life. But for the present time of process the actual church possesses his life and its resultant qualities only imperfectly. Lumen Gentium implies this kind of understanding of the church (CC 8e) when it states that "the church shows forth in the world the mystery of the Lord in a faithful though shadowed way, until at the last it will be revealed in total splendor." In this sentence, which has been referred to as the most important in Chapter One,[4] it is admitted that the "this world"

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[4]Gerard Philips, "The Church: Mystery and Sacrament," in Vatican II: An Interfaith Appraisal (Notre Dame, Indiana, 1966), p. 196.

stature of the church is imperfect and that she achieves her definition only partially. As a pilgrim the church untriumphant is but moving toward her final state of "total splendor." The importance of Cardinal Lercaro's much heralded intervention regarding the identification of visible and mystical body in the original text is evident. He asked that a revised text reflect the fact that the two aspects of the church are not altogether identical "at the existential and historical level."[5]

For the present the church must work toward becoming completely what she already is now in an incomplete though real way. Nevin understood the actual church to be a process that would cease reaching forward to new developments only when the ideal church and the actual church were fully and finally one (N IV. 1, 2). In its historical evolution the pilgrim church always falls short of the perfection destined for it. In this his description accords with the council's, the church as the people of God on pilgrimage. The mystery of God is at work in history in his human, fallible, pilgrim people, a church always in need of reformation (CC 8, DE 6, 7, and MW 43). The distinction used in the triumphal language of a former time between the church which is holy and her members who are sinful is not employed by the council fathers. It is the church itself, the actual church, which is sinful and constantly in need of renewal. Only at the end of her pilgrimage will she attain the full perfection to which she

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[5]Cited in Ignacio Riudor, "Membership in the Church in Lumen Gentium," Theology Digest 15 (Spring, 1967), 14.

is called in Christ (CC 8e, 48). The perfection of the end time has already come upon her, but not fully; the restoration which the world awaits has already begun in Christ who continues to draw all men to himself (CC 48, passim).

In the visible form which the church has taken it has an organic structure (CC 9a, 11a) in which grace has primacy over juridical structure. Apropos of this several commentators have called attention to the significance of placing a chapter on "The People of God" between the chapter on "The Hierarchical Structure of the Church" and one entitled "The Mystery of the Church." The implication is that greater value in structuring the church is given, not to what makes it a juridical society but to what constitutes it a community of life through sharing in the mystery prolonged in the church.

It need not be emphasized how such a description accords with Nevin's model of the church based upon the biological metaphor of an organic life structure. Like Nevin the council fathers (CC 7) develop the Pauline doctrine of Christ uniting men through his humanity in order to make them "mystically into his own body" (CC 7a). His life is shared; and the church, in the manner of an organism, is described as "budding forth" as a result and as straining toward fulfillment as she "slowly grows" (5d). Life in the church is from the vine (6c) and she is "mother" (6e) who nourishes and brings forth life from Christ who is our life (9d). Through the sacraments the organic structure grows (11a), especially through the eucharist (CC 11b and CL 2, 10).

Each of the aspects of the church's organic life in Christ referred to in Lumen Gentium can be paralleled in Nevin. One may judge that in the constitution on the church, no less than in Nevin, the underlying model for the church is organic life in Christ which creates communion of life with him and with others.

Sharing in the mystery.--The distinction which Nevin developed between the ideal and the actual church allowed him to account for defective response to the mystery on the part of churches while affirming the reality of their incorporation into the life of Christ. The actual church, in its various manifestations, is a process within history always pressing forward to completion, though always falling short of the ideal in any given period. For this reason a religious denomination, as a "one-sided and defective manifestation of the Christian life," must always be considered as symbolic of this incompleteness. They are interimistic and subordinate to what he called "church wholeness." No part of the actual church can claim perfection, for the full acceptance of the ideal into the actual church must await the end time. For the present, the church of Christ is manifest in varying degrees according, so he believed, to a church's fidelity to the apostles' creed.

In a similar way Lumen Gentium in its final text embraces the kind of expansiveness which Nevin's understanding of the processive, incomplete quality of the church in history allowed. The simpler original version favored an identification of the life power of the new creation with the

structured society of the Roman Catholic Church. But the final text suggests that the community of grace in Christ does not coincide with the historical social body. While the church "subsists in" the Roman Catholic Church, as the text now reads, there is no simple identification of the two so as to exclude ecclesial elements present elsewhere (CC8b).

In fact, other confessions for the first time are referred to as churches. Commentators on Lumen Gentium have called attention to the importance of another change made in the constitution to support the more expansive view of the church just alluded to.[6] Through this second change those who are members of the church of Christ in the Roman Catholic Church (and who are in addition in possession of the Spirit through their openness to him) are called "fully" members of the church whereas before they were called "really" members. This change implies that there are "real" members of the church of Christ who are not in communion with Rome. The range of those "incorporated" into the church of Christ is widened by the change to include those who are not "fully" incorporated because they belong to what are, by the Council's standard, structurally deficient churches. All of that is familiar.

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[6]See, for example, Ignacio Riudor, ibid., pp. 12-16; Gregory Baum, "The Ecclesial Reality of the Other Churches," Concilium, vol. 4, The Church and Ecumenism (New York, 1965), pp. 62-86; Thomas F. Stransky, "The Decree on Ecumenism," in Vatican II: An Interfaith Appraisal, pp. 377-87. For a discussion of the less perfect incorporation allowed by the change from reapse to plene, see Sister Emily Joseph Binns, The Evolution of the Concept of the Church as Body of Christ in the Period between Vatican Council I and Vatican Council II (M.A. dissertation, The Catholic University of America, 1966), especially pages 46-57.

It follows that the church of Christ in its historical existence transcends what the Constitution on the church considers its unique institutional realization in the Roman Catholic Church. It includes other Christian communities. In these too the mystery of salvation is present and celebrated, and, it may be, possessed and celebrated in a more perfect manner than by a community having what the Council considers a full complement of saving means. The quality of a Christian community is measured by its response in faith to God's word spoken in Christ, not by the quality of means available to it. But with respect to means, the Decree on Ecumenism acknowledges (explicitly with respect to the Orthodox and implicitly for others) that non-Roman churches and ecclesial communities have developed saving means not always found or emphasized in the Catholic church. These means of salvation are recognized as capable of up-building the church of Christ (DE 15, 16, 17, 21, 22, 23). Viewing the statements of the council fathers from the point of view of Nevin one understands the church of Christ as existing in varying imperfect manifestations. There is imperfection in the Roman Catholic Church, even with its large complement of means, by its failure to develop or to emphasize saving means which are found heightened in other churches. In other ecclesial communities and churches imperfection is found in their defective complement of saving means although they may have developed or stressed means not found in Roman Catholicism. To hasten the movement toward a more perfect state of existence in the church of the future, the churches both need and complement each other.

As part of the salvific means available in the local churches, the council, in the constitution on the church and elsewhere (CC 26, 3, 11; DE 21a; CL 2, 33), emphasized the preaching of the gospel and the mystery of the eucharist. If a local congregation outside the Roman Catholic institution listens faithfully to the gospel and shares in the eucharist, it is a manifestation of the church of Christ even if by its imperfection it is not united with the rest of the church. In this connection the reader may recall the importance which Nevin placed upon the celebration of the eucharist (including its celebration of the Word, although he was accused of giving insufficient emphasis by his unaccustomed emphasis on the eucharist). It was primary for manifesting and increasing the presence of the church. An analysis of Dr. Nevin's teaching on the eucharist has shown that the church, described by its celebrating the eucharist, is the community of those who through faith personally share in the life of Christ through the Spirit and who are mystically united with God through personal union with Christ. In Nevin's understanding of the church as well as in the Council's (CC 3, 26; CL 2) the eucharist is the primary source of the mystery whose celebration both manifests and creates the community which is the church. The church is where the eucharist is rightly celebrated and where Christians thereby signify their life in communion with Christ (DE 21, 22 and N III. C).

2. The Church and Doctrinal Formulations of Faith

In Nevin as well as in Vatican II the church of Christ is viewed as his mystery in process toward full realization. This emphasis on the mystery suggests in each case that the shared mystical life in Christ which makes it an organism is the church's underlying structure. It suggests further that greater value in structuring the church is to be given to what constitutes it as a community of life than to what makes it a juridical, hierarchical society. The actualization of Christ's life in forming a community of life in the historically situated church is a slow, steady evolutionary process which always bears the mark of time and culture, of incompletion and human imperfection.[7]

Nevin's emphasis upon the organic life structure of the church and upon its imperfect stature in history reminds the "actual" church of its abiding temptation to make its expression, either structurally or doctrinally, in any historical moment to be permanent as though this were the perfect embodiment of the church and its faith. The church is perfect and complete in its root only, but in its actualization it is evolving toward fulfillment. Visible structure, doctrinal formulation, and organs and functions arising from the church's vitality serve her evolution and growth. As diaconal they are provisional just as the in via quality of the

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[7]For a recent Roman Catholic expression of the incompleteness of the one church and its movement toward completeness, see Peter Chirico, "One Church: What Does It Mean?", Theological Studies 28 (1967), 659-682.

pilgrim church to which they minister implies. They are relative to the upbuilding of the people of the church just as their diaconal role demands; they are not a separate entity with autonomous life and direction. The diaconal role of ministry and church order will be dealt with in a subsequent section. For the present it is necessary to consider the underlying life structure of the church and its relation to doctrinal formulations.

The Constitution on the church referred to the charismatic structure of the church (CC 12), showing that the whole people of God shares in Christ's prophetic office.[8] Communally and individually the entire church is "annointed" and moved by the Holy Spirit. And this enlightenment by the Spirit produces in the church not only various charismata but a sense of faith by which the whole church infallibly possesses its belief. Catholic theology recently has spoken more freely about the need for the hierarchy, not excluding the papacy, to take account of and dialogue with this sense of faith.[9]

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[8]See Hans Küng, The Church (New York, 1967), pp. 150-203 and "The Charismatic Structure of the Church," in Concilium, vol. 4 (New York, 1965), 41-61. On the need for prophetic guidance in the church today, see Avery Dulles, "The Succession of Prophets in the Church," Concilium, vol. 34 (New York, 1968), 52-62. Also, Karl Rahner, The Dynamic Element in the Church (New York, 1964).

[9]Hans Küng, art. cit., p. 44, n. 4; Gregory Baum, "The Magisterium in a Changing Church," Concilium, vol. 21 (New York, 1967), 67-83; George Dejaive, "Ex Sese, Non autem ex Consensu Ecclesiae," Eastern Churches Quarterly, 14 (1962), 360-378; Karl Rahner, "Democracy in the Church?" in The Month, 40 (1968), 106-119; John W. Glaser, "Authority, Connatural Knowledge, and the Spontaneous Judgment of the Faithful," Theological Studies, 29 (1968), 742-51. The issue has been raised recently in reaction to the encyclical, Humanae Vitae.

Taking note of the sense of faith is necessary for discerning the Spirit in the church so that she may remain fundamentally in the truth. In a manner reminiscent of John Nevin, Hans Küng has referred to two requisite considerations in the process of discerning formulations of the faith. First, the binding force they possess, arising from the degree to which they have the church behind them, must be taken into account. Secondly, discernment must consider the fragmentariness of formulations made by historically conditioned human beings in human language which may, even in a true statement, leave unsaid much else that is true.[10] An understanding of the charismatic structure of the church and of the need for formulations to reflect the sense of faith has been set forth in the development of Nevin's thought (N V.2, 3). Doctrinal expression, he said, must be "the life of the church itself" embodied in a form of speech which is "recognized and responded to by the church at large as its own word." The truth is in the church's life as a whole, and that is where it should be sought for formulation "in a perfectly human and historical way." Statements of the faith must be tested against the life of the church, that is, against the living response of faith to apostolic kerygma.

Doctrine was provisional for Nevin much in the manner in which Frans Josef van Beeck speaks of it as "diakonia to the church in via" which

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[10]Küng, The Church, 342-43; also, see Structures of the Church (New York, 1964), Chapter 8 on infallibility of the church.

may never be allowed "to fix the church somewhere in the past."[11] There is need for continual return to what van Beeck calls the "antepredicative situation," the fundamental apostolic profession of faith. Fidelity to the apostolic witness is, in Nevin's ecclesiology, the guarantor of the organism's life in Christ; and this life is the source which gives rise, out of its vitality, to the church's expressions of her faith.

Despite Nevin's admirable sensitivity to historical process and the sense of incompletion and flexibility it creates, he maintained a rigid adherence to the apostles' creed as the unique expression of Christian faith. In his theology John Nevin gave unquestioned primacy to the apostles' creed as the touchstone of orthodoxy and of Christian unity. The creed is the consciousness of the faith of the church about the meaning and consequence of her life. Unlike other expressions of faith which are the fruit of continuing theological reflection, it does not bear the mark of the provisional. It is the direct, spontaneous witness of Christianity to biblical faith in Christ and contemplation of his meaning. The gospel proclaimed in the creed is, as Nevin says, "the necessary form of the gospel as this is first apprehended by faith."

It is questionable whether the distinctive and unchallenged position Nevin gives to the apostles' creed is supportable even in view of his own

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[11] "Toward an Ecumenical Understanding of the Sacraments," Journal of Ecumenical Studies 3 (1966), 76.

criteria for confessions of faith as relative to and reflective of the life of the church in its historical, processive movement. The developed creed as a confession is already, as the fruit of self-reflection, one step removed from the New Testament. This is true even though in its root expression in Peter's confession the creed antedates the gospels. In its final form it is already a reflection upon scriptural faith in the light of tradition. Why cannot a subsequent reflection of the church upon scriptural faith result in further, but not contrary, expressions of the consciousness of the church regarding its faith? Despite his failure to justify adequately the unique position of this credal statement, his emphasis upon it as the expression of biblical faith heightens the importance of making all reflection upon the faith by the living historical church scripturally based and of being continually judged by its standard.

Tradition has much in it of human origin and failing, much of the effect of cultural, polemical and political concern. The "actual" church must always be testing its traditions and drawing, with the difficulty this involves, a line between traditions which merely witness to ancient usages in the church and those which represent the revelation of Christ. The New Testament itself does not give a complete catalogue of early church beliefs, but it does state what cannot be changed. As such it is a rule of faith as recorded by the church and one which the church can develop and expand but not falsify. The prominence which Nevin has given to the church as a living organism giving rise to those ministries serving its vitality

stresses the need for constant interpretation in the post-apostolic church if the written record is to be more than dead letter. This re-interpretation of writings within the living community is at the same time a reconsideration and re-evaluation of former interpretations. For this reason the magisterium of the church is, as the Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation notes, the servant of sacred scripture "listening to it devoutly" (#10) aware that the church's understanding of it can "mature" (#12) and grow in understanding (#8).

3. The Church and Sacraments

Among the promising developments in recent Catholic sacramental theology one may list a personalist approach to sacraments, their Christological focus, and their ecclesial aspect.[12] The similarity between these recent emphases in Catholic theology and those in Nevin is evident in the concern of each to preserve the objectivity of Christ's grace offered within the church and the need for personal faith for the reception of grace.

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[12]See Matthew O'Connell, "New Perspectives in Sacramental Theology," Worship, 39 (1965), 195-206. Studies of primary value are Karl Rahner, The Church and the Sacraments (New York, 1963); Edward Schillebeeckx, Christ the Sacrament of the Encounter with God (New York, 1963); Otto Semmelroth, Church and Sacrament (Notre Dame, Ind., 1965). For a recent assessment of Catholic sacramental theology, see The Sacraments in General, ed. Edward Schillebeeckx, Concilium, vol. 31 (New York, 1967); especially the articles by Yves Congar, Jacques Dournes, and Otto Semmelroth. For an example of a personalist approach to sacraments, consult Bernard Cooke, Christian Sacraments and Christian Personality (New York, 1965) as well as the contribution of the same author, "The Presence of Christ," in Commonweal, 87 (1967), 264-69.

A personalist approach has shifted emphasis from extrinsic factors to persons, away from materializing sacraments to personalizing them in a way which heightens the need for surrender in faith in this most real yet imperfect encounter. In the same sign Christ really and effectively offers transforming grace and man in faith is imperfectly configured to the risen Lord. Another similarity is found in the interest of recent Catholic theology and of Nevin in the gradual growth into the one mystery of Christ as a past event, a present reality, and a promise of fulfillment. The emphasis is upon Christ, recovering a stress found in the Fathers and reflected in the eucharistic hymn of St. Thomas, O Sacrum Convivium. Sacraments are memorials of the mystery of Christ, a present sharing in the Spirit-filled humanity of Christ, and a promise of likeness to Christ in the eschaton. And thirdly, there is a similarity in the realization of the two approaches that growth in the mystery takes place in the community which draws the individual into its life, the movement to the Father in Christ. Through this movement the individual is sanctified in and through the church where Christ is present.

In connection with the last mentioned similarity, the ecclesial reality of sacraments, Chapter Three of this study has developed the idea that the saving life which embraces the whole of humanity is rooted in the humanity of the risen Christ. Life is present and offered to men in and through the visible church. The ordering of this life is from the source in Christ to the community to the individual. In this way the

mystery of the incarnation is extended historically through the church, the visible mediator of Christ's life. This implies, as Nevin wrote, the existence of sacraments if the saving life of Christ is to be present visibly to individuals. The church, itself sacramental, gives rise to sacraments from its resources.

Although the Mercersburg professor did not use the phrase "fundamental sacrament," his description of the church as the fundamental presence of the grace of Christ as well as his concept of the church giving rise to sacraments out of its resources invites us to think of the church as Karl Rahner has. The latter speaks of the church in terms of "fundamental sacrament," as "wellspring" of sacraments in the strict sense.[13] There is generally a striking similarity between Rahner and Nevin in this area. For example, what Rahner says of the relationship between church and sacraments might have been written by the professor at Mercersburg more than a hundred years ago. "A deeper understanding of the church," Rahner writes, "may be gained by asking what the sacraments are, and greater comprehension of the sacraments, by reflecting on what the church is."[14] And that in capsule form is a statement of the methodology in his study which so clearly parallels Nevin's. He shows the connection between the church and sacraments by dealing with the former as the

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[13] The Church and the Sacraments, pp. 18, 23. See the treatment of "Ursakrament" in Otto Semmelroth, op. cit.

[14] The Church and the Sacraments, pp. 9-10.

church of the sacraments, in this way moving toward a correct understanding of the sacraments by better understanding the church. And, secondly, he studies the various sacraments "as the living accomplishment of the church's nature" so that the relation of each to the church may be recognized and consequently a better understanding of the church's nature achieved. One readily recognizes the similarity in this approach with the one employed by Nevin in dealing with the relationship between church and sacraments.

Like Nevin, Rahner makes much of the church's relationship with the incarnation. He calls the church the "fundamental sacrament" not by some vague borrowing of the concept of sacrament from current speculation about the sacraments, but by deriving it from Christology.[15] The church is similar in structure to the incarnation and is the "one abiding symbolic presence of the eschatological redemptive grace of Christ." The grace of God is in the "flesh" of an historical and tangible ecclesiastical embodiment. Sacraments in the ordinary sense are instances of the actualization of the church's essence as the saving presence of Christ's grace for the individual.

The reader of Nevin is familiar with the church described by Rahner as the continuance of the eschatologically triumphant presence of God's salvific will in the world. Here the church is seen, as it was so

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[15] Ibid., pp. 23-24.

prominently displayed in John Nevin, as the historical presence of grace, the "official presence," as Rahner says, "of the grace of Christ in the public history of the one human race."[16] Through her sacraments she attains the highest degree of actualization of what she always is, the presence of redemptive grace for men. The church stands in history as the mediator between the life-giving humanity of the risen Christ and all of humanity redeemed in him who shares his life through the sacraments in the church. What Rahner writes concerning this mediating position may be applied honestly to Nevin's concept of the church and sacraments: "Viewed in relation to Christ, the church is the abiding promulgation of his grace-giving presence in the world. Viewed in relation to the sacraments, the church is the primal and fundamental sacrament."[17]

Schillebeeckx, like Rahner and Nevin, relates the church both to Christ and to the sacramental acts of the church which unite the Christian to the risen life of Christ.[18] But in Schillebeeckx there is an emphasis not found in the other two upon personal encounter with Christ in the sacraments which he describes further as acts of Christ. The risen Lord is present visibly by extending on earth in visible form the function of his now invisible bodily reality. The church is the extension of the body

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[16] Ibid., p. 18.

[17] Ibid., p. 19.

[18] Schillebeeckx, Christ the Sacrament of the Encounter with God. (New York, 1963).

of the Lord and the sacraments share in this extension. The living Christ is encountered in this way, the invisible becoming visible in the sacraments, in the primordial visible sacrament, the church, and in its sacramental acts.[19]

With respect to sacramental acts, where Nevin emphasized merely that the life of the risen Christ was present in sacraments, Schillebeeckx stresses that a sacrament is "primarily and fundamentally a personal act of Christ." Both say essentially the same thing, that the Christian through the sacraments is brought into the presence of the risen Lord. The once for all action of Christ is an "undying now" in the language of Nevin. Schillebeeckx, on the other hand, speaking in personalist terms, brings home more clearly the present action of the risen Christ in the now. In each case the sacramental act is presented unequivocally as an ecclesial act, an institutional act performed by a person in the church who is empowered to do so by Christ. Each sacrament is the saving act of the risen Christ realized in the visible form of an official act of the church, an action which is an entry into "living contact with the visible church as the earthly mystery of Christ in heaven."[20] With that Nevin would be in complete agreement.

The objectivity of sacraments is related to their ecclesial reality. Nevin emphasized that they owe their vitality to the system within which

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[19] Ibid., pp. 40-42.

[20] Ibid., pp. 53-54.

they are comprehended. The once for all redemptive act of Christ reaches into the present in the church where his mediation and therefore his grace is at work. The sacraments, Nevin wrote, have an "intrinsic power" because the church has it, and the church has power because it is an extension of the incarnation rooted in the risen Christ. The sacraments find their power at hand in the church (contemporary theology speaks of celebrating what is already present). As a result the sacraments offer to individuals what they find at hand, although their effects may be frustrated by unbelief. One is reminded by the latter observation of Karl Rahner's distinction between offered grace and received grace. There is no question that God here and now offers his grace in the sacramental celebration, although it may be questioned whether it is received here and now.[21] In connection with a sacrament's objective power, Rahner explains the traditional opus operatum of Catholic sacramental theology as God's abiding presence to man, his word on this occasion to which man is invited to respond. Following an explanation much like Nevin's, Rahner attributes the efficaciousness of the sacraments to the fact that they are the actual fulfillment, the actualization of the church's nature whose whole reality is to be the real presence of God's grace.[22] The ideal church, Nevin would say, is made actual

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[21]Rahner, The Church and the Sacraments (New York, 1963).

[22]Ibid., p. 39.

through the reception in faith of Christ's life made present, signed and sealed, in the sacraments.

Renewed interest in the eucharist by Roman Catholics has focused recently in new expressions of the conversion traditionally described as transubstantiation.[23] The reality, meaning, and purpose which the eucharistic elements convey have been described by the words transignification and transfinalization. These attempts to use the more personal categories of phenomenology are another example of emphasis on the encounter aspect of sacraments within the community. They de-emphasize the materialization of the eucharist and the subjectivity of its reception inherited from a former time. They are attempts to rid the description of the eucharist of the cultural, religious, and philosophical bias of another day. Rather than examine the eucharistic conversion in isolation as a substance, the newer approach stresses the relation to man of Christ through the elements. The Lord takes the elements and offers through them a new reality which gives them a new meaning and purpose. Christ

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[23]For example, see Schillebeeckx, "Transubstantiation, Transfinalization, Transignification," Worship 40 (1966), 324-338; Piet Schoonenberg, "Eucharistic Presence," Cross Currents 17 (1967), 39-54; Charles Davis, "The Theology of Transubstantiation," Sophia (1964) and by the same author, "Understanding the Real Presence," in The Word in History (New York, 1966), pp. 154-178; Herbert McCabe, "The Real Presence," Clergy Review (1964), pp. 749-59. A systematic treatment of major developments since 1958 is given in Joseph M. Powers, Eucharistic Theology (New York, 1967); it is especially helpful for bibliographical report of the eucharistic debate in the Netherlands. See also, Edward Schillebeeckx, The Eucharist (New York, 1968).

is present offering and inviting in the community in a sacramental setting whose structure is a community meal. The expression of faith in his presence is in the eating by which the communicant, at the same time, manifests his conformity to the community faith.

In the context of faith the sacraments are the language in which the community and Christ communicate. This faith is first of all that of the community, and it belongs to the individual to the extent that he is in and of the community. Christ is present to the community faith, and through the community he is consequently present to the individual. The "ecclesial reality" of a sacrament is Christ present in some way to the faith of the community. In the eucharist, unlike the other sacraments, the ecclesial reality is the presence of Christ himself, present as what he is rather than as what he does. He is the unity of all who are members of him--our unity is not just brought about by his action, but our unity is Christ. The sacrament of our unity is Christ himself. His presence in the eucharist is, as Herbert McCabe has written, "sheer ecclesial reality."[24] He is what the church eschatologically is and is moving toward. In Nevin's terms, Christ is the ideal church; in his glorified humanity a new creation is rooted. To be in union with him through the community, and especially in its "concentrated sign" of his presence in the eucharist, is to be in the church as it achieves a new degree of actuality.

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[24]The ideas in the paragraph reflect Herbert McCabe, art. cit., especially, 754-56, 759.

Much as in Nevin, Catholic writers today see the eucharist as closely related to the mystery of the church. It is the mystery of the church made actual.[25] Whenever the church acts it reaches a higher degree of actuality or becomes present with a new fullness, but this occurs in greater measure when the church acts as a community. The privileged moment of her action as a community is in the celebration of the eucharist. The church is made actual as an event with the greatest intensity "in its total reality as the communion of all those who are in Christ, united to him in his death and resurrection."[26] In this celebration, as Rahner has shown, the church attains the highest actuality of her own nature because "everything that goes to form the church is found fully and manifestly present."[27] That is why Nevin wrote, in the same vein, that our view of the Lord's supper must condition in the end the conception we form of the church.

4. Ministry and Church Order

The studies of both Rahner and Schillebeeckx referred to in the previous section, and especially the third and longest chapter of Lumen Gentium, remind the reader that, from the point of view of such standards,

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[25]See, for example, Karl Rahner, The Church and the Sacraments, pp. 82-87 and Charles Davis, "Episcopate and Eucharist," Worship 38 (1963-64), esp., pp. 508-13.

[26]Davis, "The Theology of Transubstantiation," p. 509.

[27]Op. cit., pp. 84-85.

the concept of the church found in Nevin is somewhat deficient with respect to structure. Rahner refers to the double aspect of the church, historically visible in space and time, as both juridical and social as well as the people of God.[28] Schillebeeckx shows that "the grace of redemption becomes visible in the church in a two fold manner: through office and through charism." Redemptive grace is visible institutionally through the priestly activity of the hierarchy and through the ecclesial office proper to the laity. It is visible charismatically as well through the activity of both hierarchy and laity manifesting outwardly their inward communion in grace with God.[29] The Constitution on the Church too, while maintaining priorities which would appeal to Nevin, gives larger berth to the structures and government of the church than he would. But the Constitution begins where Nevin does, laying a foundation with the notion of the church as a people to whom God communicates himself in love. Upon this charismatic base the role of the hierarchy in its ministerial function and of the other ranks of the church is discussed. The democratic note struck by the document in this and in other respects would have appealed to Nevin.

The structured institution was not a prominent part of Nevin's ecclesiology, even though he was deeply impressed by the sign of unity

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[28] Ibid., p. 18.

[29] Schillebeeckx, Christ the Sacrament of the Encounter with God, p. 52.

expressed by the episcopacy of the patristic period and agreed that the institution of the papacy had been valuable in the development of the church. They were expendable aspects of the church, valuable but not necessary, toward which he maintained an open mind. But his emphasis is toward the charismatic with, as his treatment of the ministry indicates, enough of the institutional to guarantee order and orthodoxy. Making allowances for Nevin's view of hierarchy, his picture of the church is the one given in the paired concepts of Lumen Gentium (8a) which balance the divine and the human.[30]

Balance between the divine and the human in the church is a recurring problem. In the past, as Hans Küng has shown, the fundamental error of ecclesiologies was their failure properly to relate office holders to the underlying charismatic level of communion in grace with God through faith. These ecclesiologies failed to realize that all who hold office are

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[30]Writing out of the Catholic tradition but not necessarily as spokesmen for that tradition, Charles Davis, A Question of Conscience (New York, 1967) and Rosemary Ruether, The Church Against Itself (New York, 1967) question the legitimate future of the institutional church and its hierarchical ecclesiology. Davis, because the visible church has lost credibility as a community of truth, love, and justice; Ruether, because the structural church is an "historified" church which has abandoned its eschatological direction and has fallen from spirit to flesh. Both see higher values for the church than the value which comes from external structure just as Nevin does, but neither sufficiently accounts for the incarnational quality of the church as he does. In their option for purity or holiness in the church as a higher value than an external sign of unity each fails to account for the human. They allow the church to fade into an unrealistic spiritualism.

primarily members of a fellowship of believers. Compared with this fundamental fact any office is of secondary if not tertiary importance.[31] First and foremost the church is a fellowship of faith and "only in this light can ecclesiastical office be properly understood." Like Nevin, Küng heightens the underlying life of the faith community upon which the structure depends and out of which its ministerial office grow. He insists on constant return to origins in the gospel (as Nevin did by reference to the apostles' creed) for discernment of the church's fidelity to the apostolic witness and mission. In this way the church retains its vitality.

The primacy given to the charism of the pastoral office above other charismata is based upon the traditional understanding of apostolic succession. But concerning this there are two important points which have not always been observed. The first is that the whole church is in apostolic succession, as Küng points out, provided the church and individuals are in agreement with and continue the apostolic witness and

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[31]Küng, The Church, p. 363; the thoughts on charism and apostolic succession of the church are reflections based on the same volume in D. IV and E. I, II. See also his "The Charismatic Structure of the Church," Concilium, 4 (New York, 1965). On the succession of the whole community and its precedence over treatment of hierarchical succession, see Johannes Remmers, "Apostolic Succession: An Attribute of the Church," in Concilium, vol. 34 (New York, 1968), 36-51. In this connection, Gregory Baum writes, "The hierarchy in the church must be understood in terms of ministry. It is therefore essential but secondary in the church; primary is the reality to which they minister, namely the people. Since the Spirit is at work among the people, the hierarchy cannot exercise its normative role as teacher and its role as legislator in fidelity to this Spirit unless it is in constant dialogue with the entire church." Letter in America, January 6, 1968,

mission. And secondly, there is succession in the church of other charisms including those of prophets and teachers who have a right to be heard, as well as succession in pastoral offices. A church sensitive to the whole of itself and to its life in the Spirit must be more organic than mechanical, more flexible than rigid, more democratic than monarchical. The church must be, as Nevin would want to say, more human than divine in living, formulating, and expressing its faith.

Apostolic succession in both Nevin and Küng is more a question of the quality of faith than of proven historical continuity. Basing his conclusion upon the history of the church in the new testament period, Küng has shown that ways of conceiving entry into apostolic succession can be recognized which differ from the accustomed way described in Catholic tradition. The decisive criterion is the succession of a believer in a believing community to the faith of the apostles. The critical factor is not the historical aspect of proven succession, however valuable that may be for other reasons.

Recent Catholic scholarship, in formulating its case for the recognition of Protestant ministry and church order,[32] has described

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[32]The principal study is Frans Josef van Beeck, "Toward An Ecumenical Understanding of the Sacraments," Journal of Ecumenical Studies, 3 (1966), 57-112. Daniel J. O'Hanlon, "New Approach to the Validity of Church Orders," Worship, 41 (1967), 406-21 affirms van Beeck's thesis and expands it; Harry J. McSorley, "Protestant Eucharistic Reality and Lack of Orders," The Ecumenist, 5 (1966-67), 68-75 asserts that the Decree on Ecumenism in Chapter Three, #22, confirms van Beeck's main contention "that the reality of a sacrament has never been

the ministry in terms quite similar to Nevin's. These studies tend to associate the traditional Catholic concept of the validity of sacraments with a juridical claim by the church to recognize them or not. This norm is not concerned with the essence of sacraments which is the celebration of and communion with the mystery of salvation. Validity is "the finishing touch" of every normal sacramental celebration.[33] But given the existence of Christians in good faith apart from the normal church order, salvation may be celebrated by them in virtue of Christ's presence. In a manner fairly reminiscent of John Nevin's explanation of the church functioning as an organism, the community in extraordinary circumstances is understood as bringing forth those who minister to and order its life.

In reaching for an understanding which would permit Catholic recognition and acceptance of Protestant ministry and church order, stress is placed upon the diakonia of church order rather than upon ontic or "physical" powers.[34] Church order is not conceived of as something somehow alongside the community with a separate existence of its own, but it is defined entirely with reference to the church whose life it orders but does not control. It can only function by relying on the vital forces at

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univocally linked up with the validly ordained minister." See also, Maurice Villain, "The Chain of Imposition of Hands," Concilium, vol. 34 (New York, 1968), 87-104; also, John Jay Hughes, Absolutely Null and Utterly Void (Washington, D.C., 1968).

[33]Van Beeck, art. cit., p. 63.

[34]See, as an example, Gregory Baum, "The Ministerial Priesthood," The Ecumenist, 4 (1965-66), 4-7.

work in the community and not on its own ordering functions. Apostolic succession, which oversees entry into the ministry, is understood as primarily concerned with the continuation of an organic life structure. As Frans Josef van Beeck writes, the handing on of authority "remains based on the idea of diakonia and may never be allowed to detach itself from it in order to lead a separate pipeline existence."[35]

May not the diakonia rendered to Protestant communities existing in good faith for protracted periods be recognized as the sacrament of order? It can be shown that the facts of history do not support the view that the grace of the apostolic ministry is tied exclusively to historic apostolic succession. Even if the normal pattern has been suspended so that the origin of the diakonia is not the result of a strict historical episcopal succession, it is still possible for a church to have the sacrament of order. It has been suggested that the "competence" of the minister is not a separate "extrinsic" condition for a true celebration of the sacrament of order any more than it is for other sacraments. Through the ministry of its ministers the church celebrates the sacrament. The church celebrates its salvation as a community of those who have been baptized into the mystery. The sacrament of order is seen as an intensification and specification of the sacrament of baptism.[36] The diakonia is

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[35]Art. cit., p. 103.

[36]O'Hanlon, art. cit., p. 418.

not tied in this case of extraordinary existence to historic apostolic succession but it is bound to apostolic tradition by reason of good faith and doctrinal integrity. As Van Beeck reminds his readers, apostolic succession after all "is to be defined entirely with reference to apostolic tradition of which it is the ministerial concretization."

Through apostolic succession the episcopacy stands as the "sacrament" of apostolic tradition and church unity. It is the normal way of vital union with the apostolic tradition. Contemporary Catholic thought sees another entry to apostolic tradition in the concept of the protracted extraordinary ministry in good faith of Protestant churches. In terms which remind the reader of Nevin's ecclesial structure as an organism giving rise to those functions necessary for its life and growth, Van Beeck speaks of the ante-juridical reality, the vital forces upon which the legal system, which deals with "validity," relies. It is this life at work in the church which the legal system regulates in normal conditions. Given extraordinary circumstances, the underlying vital forces are laid bare, stripped of their legal overlay. They give rise out of their vitality to the extraordinary ministry necessary for the growth of the community in the faith of the apostolic tradition.

John Nevin's understanding of the ministry in apostolic succession (N. V. 6) is similar to the view given above. He too saw that while the channeling of ministry and church order into union with apostolic tradition was necessary, apostolic succession could be understood in another way

than the "mechanical" transmission of power. He closely associates apostolic succession with apostolic tradition. A church and its ministry are in apostolic succession when they are in union with apostolic tradition through fidelity to the apostles' creed and the biblical faith it expresses. The ministerial collegium, by reason of the commission of Christ, guides the entry of ministers who are in union with the apostolic tradition. When there is fidelity to the apostolic tradition the community is able to celebrate and realize salvation through its ministers. As Daniel O'Hanlon writes, where there is a good faith celebration in extraordinary circumstances, "it is the same sacrament as in an ordinary celebration." With respect to the ministry and the sacrament which the church celebrates, it is suggested that by simply being accepted they should become "valid" as well as what they already are,true and effective. The extraordinary minister in a church which celebrates the mystery truly and effectively should, by explicit recognition, become ordinary minister.[37]

In connection with sacramental celebrations, it is clear that the intention of the Decree on Ecumenism was to affirm that Protestant churches have in their celebrations of the Lord's supper something of the reality of the eucharistic mystery even when the sacrament of orders is lacking. It is more than spiritual communion or votum sacramenti which sufficed as an explanation in another period. The "something" may even be the essential element while "validity" is the rounding off or secondary

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[37] Ibid.

element. This has bearing upon the question of recognition of Protestant ministry. It follows from the Decree on Ecumenism, (#22) and its interpretation by the Secretariat for Christian Unity that first of all the sacrament of orders, validly conferred by Catholic standards, is not absolutely necessary for making "something" of the eucharistic mystery present; but secondly, that the sacrament of orders is one of the conditions necessary for making present the genuine and integral substance of the eucharistic mystery.[38] That is, it is necessary in order to give full expression of church unity by a minister in ordered relationship to the episcopacy, "the canon and touchstone of all . . . church order" as Van Beeck says.

The sacrament of orders is necessary to achieve the full expression of church unity, that is, the integral substance of the eucharistic mystery. But integrality is not always achieved. It may then be asked why the ministry which functions in churches having "something" of the mystery may not be recognized as possessing "something" of the sacrament of orders. What is deficient in each case may be what Van Beeck calls "the finishing touch,"[39] apart from which a church, such as the one described by John Nevin, may nevertheless truly and effectively celebrate salvation.

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[38]McSorley, art. cit., p. 74.

[39]Van Beeck, art. cit., p. 63.

5. Summary and Reflection

Underlying the visible structure of the pilgrim church in its historical evolution is its invisible organic structure. The church is a community of life in Christ based upon fidelity to the apostolic witness and mission under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. As such the church of Christ embraces ecclesial communities beyond Roman Catholicism, wherever the mystery of salvation is celebrated in good faith with the means available. Complementarity of traditions is heightened by the observation that other ecclesial communities have not only the primary means of salvation, baptism, the eucharist and the word, but have developed saving means not always found or emphasized in Catholicism.

Ministry and church order, the sacraments, and expressions of the church's faith emerge out of and serve the growth of the organism which undergirds them. First, regarding expressions of faith, the underlying life in the Spirit gives the whole church a sense of faith which no part of the church, especially the hierarchy who serve the community, can ignore. The entire church, historically and culturally conditioned, must continually discern its sense of faith if it is to remain fundamentally in the truth. It is only by remaining in the truth of the apostolic faith that the organism grows. Secondly, the organic community of life is the fundamental sacrament and wellspring of the other sacraments. The latter celebrate the life in Christ already present to the faith of the community. Finally, apostolic succession which grounds the primacy

(among the charismata) of the pastoral office and orders it, is more a question of fidelity to the apostolic witness and mission than it is of a proven historic continuity. It is this fidelity which contributes to the vitality of the organism, and serving this organic community is the purpose of the ministry and church order.

Having observed the emphasis upon the church as a community of life in Christ which is common to Nevin and to contemporary Catholic theological development, the question may be raised why there is a similarity. It may be suggested in response that contemporary Catholic ecclesiological thinking can be considered a point in a movement with strong patristic leanings which began in the nineteenth century. It was centered at Tübingen with Johan Adam Möhler (1796-1838) as its prime mover. Möhler, it will be recalled, was deeply impressed by the same Augustus Neander who had so profoundly influenced John Nevin's thought. In his first major work, Die Einheit in der Kirche (1825), Möhler combined Neander's appreciation of the Fathers with the theme of organism.

The new ecclesiology attempted to integrate the visible structure of the church into the Christian mystery as expressed in sacred scripture and in the Fathers. In the latter Möhler discovered that the church was a living communion, "a communion in the Holy and of the saints." The movement for a renewed understanding of the church under the tutelage of the Fathers found spokesmen in the influential Carlo Passaglia (1812-1887), the teacher of Scheeben, and in his disciple Klemens Schrader (1820-1875).

Passaglia and Schrader in their study on the church spoke of "the social charity" of the church or "the charity of communion, the charity of the Body, and the Christian communion of the church," and of the sacraments as an expression of this charity of communion. Matthias Scheeben (1835-1888) wrote in a manner reminiscent of the early Fathers about the whole church "in the communion of the simple faithful as mater fidei."

Common to all of these scholars of the nineteenth century, concerned with describing the church as a community of faith and life in Christ, is a profound respect for patristic thought. They reflect the reflowering of interest in the Fathers which began in their century, aided by the comprehensive effort of J. P. Migne, the Oxford library of the Fathers, the beginning of the Vienna corpus, and others. Whether there is any direct relation between the movement centered at Tübingen in the last century and contemporary Catholic thought is difficult to determine, but there is a common interest in the thought of the early centuries. One thinks of such translations as the Sources chrétiennes and the Ancient Christian Writers; and of such men as Emile Mersch, whose prolonged study of the Fathers gave us an important work on the mystical body, of Danielou, and de Lubac. The ancient Christian sources which fed Möhler, Scheeben, and Nevin have influenced some of the most creative theologians of our century.

At any rate, one may agree with the judgment of Henri de Lubac about the thought of the Constitution on the Church, which surely reflects the minds of many periti, and its relation to early Christianity. Lumen

Gentium, he writes, describes the church as the mystery of a communion which is a visible, organized society. Each sentence in the document at least supposes this. And on this fundamental point contemporary Catholicism "is in perfect continuity with the ecclesiology of the first Christian centuries."[40]

If what de Lubac says is accurate, his remarks in another work may explain why the ideas of the patristically influenced Nevin are so compatible with contemporary Catholicism. In speaking of tradition in the Fathers, he writes that "the closer one's association with this one or that, the keener is the realization of how deep is the unity in which all those meet together who, faithful to the one church, live by the same faith in the same Holy Spirit."[41]

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Accepting the church as primarily an organic community of life in Christ, rooted in apostolic faith and annointed by the Spirit, has implications beyond those adverted to already in this chapter. For example, the acknowledgment of a Protestant ministry as competent by the Catholic church would mean recognizing an already existing reality, that the community of life in Christ is being served and nourished in

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[40] "Lumen Gentium and the Fathers," in Vatican II: An Interfaith Appraisal, pp. 153-175.

[41] Catholicism (New York, 1950), p. xiii.

particular churches where the eucharist is truly and effectively celebrated.[42] In this way one major stumbling block for Catholics to the sharing of the eucharist would be by-passed.[43] Then, with

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[42]Daniel J. O'Hanlon in "New Approaches to Church Orders," Worship, 41 (1967), 419 notes that the differences in understanding the nature of the eucharist are far less formidable than most Catholics think. "At Lund, as far back as 1952, the representatives of most of the Protestant churches were able to subscribe to this statement: 'This dominical sacrament of Christ's Body and Blood, controlled by the words of institution, with the use of the appointed elements of bread and wine, is (a) a memorial of Christ's incarnation and earthly ministry, of his death and resurrection; (b) a sacrament in which He is truly present to give Himself to us, uniting us to Himself, to His eternal Sacrifice, and to one another; and (c) eschatologically, an anticipation of our fellowship with Christ in His eternal kingdom.' " He refers to the recent agreement of the official joint dialogue group of the Roman Catholic and Episcopal Churches in the United States about their understanding of the eucharist. In n. 28, p. 419 he cites an excerpt from The Catholic Messenger (Davenport, Iowa) for June 8, 1967, quoting the joint dialogue group: "Since the time of the Reformation, the doctrine of the eucharistic sacrifice has been considered a major obstacle to the reconciliation of the Anglican Communion and the Roman Catholic Church. It is the conviction of our commission that this is no longer true."

[43]Apostolicae Curae of September 13, 1896 (Dz-Sch 3315-19) states that the priesthood is "praecipue" defined with respect to the eucharist. Concerning this, Van Beeck writes that the sacramental ministry of the "most 'churchy' church of the Reformation" is invalidated on the grounds of incompetence of its ministers. "This incompetence is ultimately based on a heretical doctrine of that sacrament which is at the heart of the ministry." Frans Josef van Beeck, "Towards an Ecumenical Understanding of the Sacraments," Journal of Ecumenical Studies 3 (1966), 60. Also, John Jay Hughes, "Recent Studies of the Validity of Anglican Orders," a bibliographical survey in Concilium, vol. 31 (New York, 1967), 134-46. The entire volume 34 of Concilium, Apostolic Succession: Re-thinking a barrier to Unity, ed. Hans Küng, is valuable in relating the question of succession to practical issues, the most important of which Küng sees as the relation between the question of intercommunion and apostolic succession. On the problem of intercommunion, see Bernard Cooke, "Eucharist: Source or Expression of Community?", Worship 40 (1966), 339-348; Paul A. Crow, "The Lord's Supper in Ecumenical Dialogue," Theology Today 22 (1965), 35-58; N. A. Nissiotis, "Worship, Eucharist and 'Intercommunion,' An orthodox Reflection," Studia Liturgica 2 (1963), 193-222; Max Thurian, "Intercommunion," Verbum Caro 17 (1963), 199-213; Lance Webb, "The

respect to the eucharist, there would be the recognition of good faith, ecclesial reality, and a competent minister, the three criteria by which the Catholic church has traditionally judged sacraments.

Another implication of an understanding of the church which stresses the primacy of the underlying community of life and which is not impeded by magisterial isolation would be an openness to both intellectual and cultural pluralism within the one faith. This is not only legitimate but may be necessary in meeting with the church's experience of contemporary history and culture. With respect to intellectual pluralism, the conditions within which theological reflection upon the faith proceeds have an effect not only on method but upon outcome as well. For the benefit of its judgment, the magisterium needs to hear and exchange with theologians who are confronting the realities of cultural, philosophical, and historical change. A redirection of theological influence away from its Roman center to the provinces is essential for healthy pluralism of thought. The prospect of influential territorial conferences of bishops and of an active episcopal senate at Rome, both reflecting the opinion of theologians in touch with regional thought currents, is a sign of health.

Lord's Supper: Source of Unity or Disorder?" The Christian Century 82 (1965), 1063-64; Bernard Leeming reviews recent documents, Protestant and Catholic, in "Again, Intercommunion," Heythrop Journal 9 (1968), 17-28; finally, Hans Küng, Journal of Ecumenical Studies 5 (1968), 576-78 lists as an untenable reason for refusing intercommunion the narrow concept of apostolic succession which questions the validity of non-catholic ministers.

A less rigid conception of structure opens the way for the Catholic church to expand and liberalize the concept of cultural pluralism to include other churches of both East and West. To some extent pluralism already exists in the Catholic church with the existence of Eastern-rite churches. Furthermore, Vatican II recognized the need for theological, liturgical, and structural pluralism in discussing the orthodox churches of the East (DE 17). This at least suggests the inclusion of other churches outside the East, churches such as the one described by Nevin in this study, in which unity in faith exists despite diversity of theological, liturgical, and structural differences dating from the Reformation.

Finally, recognizing the priority of the community of life in Christ over the structure which serves its growth suggests that the Catholic church face more openly toward the world at large to dialogue with the stirrings of Christ's life found there. The church needs to deepen its engagement with human life, history, and culture. God who involved himself in the history of man in Jesus Christ is at work redemptively in all that makes man more concerned with deepening union among men, with all that makes man more human, loving, sensitive, truthful. There is a sense in which revelation is taking place at the center of human life where God has entered into the making of man by man.

History itself is revealing. If the Word which creates the underlying community of life in the church is to remain vital, reflection upon it must be historically conditioned so that it speaks its present meaning to the

church. If God is redemptively at work in human history bringing man to a new understanding of himself then the time and culture must be the context in which the gospel faith is restated. The creative presence of the Spirit moves the church to recognize new meanings of the gospel in the developing understanding of man which also is his work.

As the Catholic church continues in dialogue within herself, with other Christians, and with the world, there must be apprehension about the result. It is in the nature of this kind of exchange that neither party is able to predetermine outcomes. The exact shape of the church of the future in doctrinal formulation and organizational forms is obscured in darkness. But the presence of the Spirit creating the church as a community of life in Christ will guide her toward greater fidelity to the apostolic witness and mission and to the formulations and church order which will best serve the Word of God as it comes to the church in each age.

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